Tales from Tennyson

Told by Nora Chesson

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TALES FROM TENNYSON

Told by

NORA CHESSON

Illustrated by

FRANCES BRUNDAGE

& M. BOWLEY

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Tales from Tennyson.

TENNYSON in prose should have a curious sound in the ears, even as the words have a curious aspect upon the paper as I write them. One feels almost like a fairy godmother of little power and less experience who has been trying her 'prentice hand on making coaches into pumpkins, cloth-of-gold and silver tissue into homespun of hodden grey, if not altogether into rags. But the intention behind the translation into prose of these poems has been most reverent, and I hope it has not altogether failed of achievement, even in poems so delicate in fancy as "The Lady of Shalott," so exquisite of workmanship as "Elaine."

Where fools rush in it may be that I have also stepped, but I have stepped lightly and deprecatingly, and my finger touched my lips that they might not utter so much as a whisper to disturb the dead greatness in his sleep. So it may be that the book is worth the reading, even as, to me, it was worth the writing, being a labour of love.

N. C.

THERE is a grey old Palace in the heart of the woods. It is lost like the forgotten answer to a riddle, and the very path to it is forgotten, for it is the Sleeping Palace. All around it the seasons are awake and busy at their work: grass-blades rise up in Spring, and sheaves are stacked in Autumn; sap moves in the veins of the leaf, and misty vapour moves in the dip of a valley or combe; but in the Sleeping Palace nothing moves at all. Nothing dies there; nothing returns or is renewed.

The grey stone urns along the edges of the terraces never crumble; the banner that droops on the flagstaff of the central tower never fades for wind or weather; the fires on the hearths in the Palace rooms never go out, although no hand feeds them with wood or coal; the peacock is asleep in the laurel-walk, and the parrot is asleep in his cage. Birds in the nests under the eaves sit sleeping on sleeping eggs; in the closets mantles droop sleepily from their golden pegs, and the moth that has begun to eat them sleeps too. There is not even the thin note of a gnat to be heard, and the Sleeping Palace, full of live men and women, seems more like a picture than the pictures on its walls.

Live men and women, did I say? Yes; the Palace is full of men and women, every one of them alive, and every one asleep at work or play, just as the fairy spell touched them a hundred years ago.

The butler is in his pantry, with a flask of his master's wine

between his knees; it is more than half empty, as it was when the spell struck him, drinking on the sly, a hundred years ago.

The wrinkled old steward sits over his account-books, pen in hand; he was doing his duty when sleep fell on him, a hundred years ago.

A page and a maid-of-honour were romping in a gallery, and they have been standing for a hundred years, hand-in-hand, asleep. In the banqueting-hall barons and knights sit at a great round table, asleep; their golden cups are still half full of wine, and in the throne-seat the King lies back asleep.

All round the Palace there is a thick hedge, so stout and strong that at a distance it looks like a little wood. It is mostly of briar and bramble, but there are other hedgerow trees there as well; thorns, each thick with heavy-scented blossom in its season; hawthorn, white-thorn, blackthorn; ivies and woodbine to bind the spreading bushes together; mistletoe, with its yellowish-green leaves and clear crystal berries, and some strange vine which bears grapes as red as blood. Over this matted wall of bush and briar and creeping plants the top-most tower-spire of the Palace is just able to look, so you can guess how tall a wall it is.

When will the hundred years be over, and the fairy spell broken, and the sands be free to run again in the glass?

When the fairy prince comes, as come he will.

THE SLEEPING BEAUTY.

She has lain asleep here in her great golden room for a hundred years, and her thick black hair has grown down to her feet, so that she lies as it were in a nest of her own making. There is no other change.

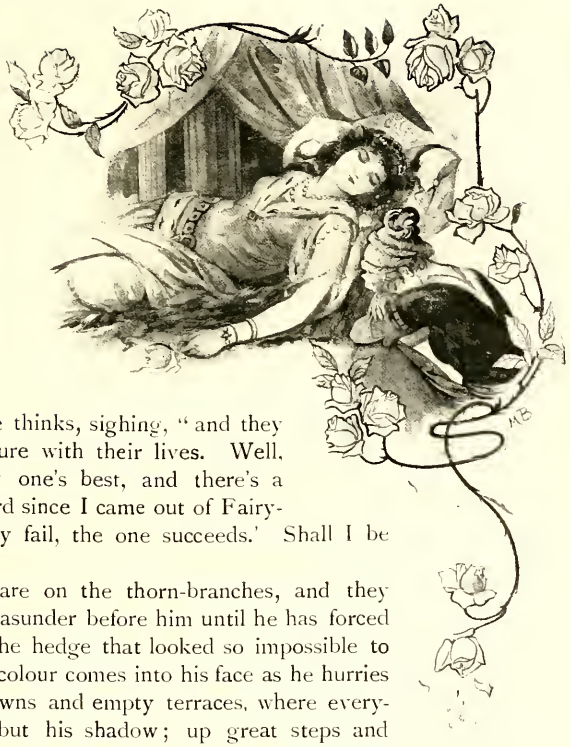
The pearls in the net she wears on her head have not changed colour, as other Princesses' pearls will; no moth has been left awake to come near the purple quilt of her bed, and eat holes in its velvet; and the sun streaming down upon it every day for a hundred years has not faded its rich colour at all. Through the deep shadow of her hair you see her arms and the diamond bracelets on them; but they never stir from her sides, and her head never moves upon the gold-fringed pillow. She is so deep asleep that she does not even dream.

THE ARRIVAL.

Sooner or later the most precious thing in the world is discovered by the one who looks for it most earnestly and ardently. Sooner or later every hedge of thorns finds someone who can scramble through it, and every enchanted Princess, sooner or later, finds her Fairy Prince.

Here he comes now, stepping into my story, coming travelling fast from a far land, over miles and miles of meadowland and waste, sailing over sea after sea to find the appointed Princess in the appointed place. His mantle gleams like a sunbeam on the grey rocks that he must cross to reach the plain that lies between him and the hedge of thorns that encircles the Sleeping Palace; his eyes are full of wonder at the great hedge and the brooding hush of the place and the hour. They are full of delight, too, for he knows that there waits for him behind all those tangled vines and keen-edged thorns something more wonderful than he has ever yet dreamed of—something more beautiful than he has ever yet seen or heard of in that Fairyland where he was born and bred, and where he grew up before the passion of discovery entered his life and set his blood on fire. Light-footed as the fox, he comes over the rocky places down into the green plain, and for a little while gazes in silence at the great grim hedge he has to climb or break through as best he can.

It *is* a grim hedge, seen close at hand. Far away it looks only high and green and beautiful, with its matted vines and flowering branches, and drooping coral and crystal berries; for in this hedgerow there is no set season, and the mistletoe is in berry and the hawthorn is in blossom at one and the same time. It is so near the Sleeping Palace that it has gone to sleep too, as far as Spring, Summer, Autumn, and Winter go, and it puts out bud, leaf, berry, and blossom in a dream. In the grass before lie heaped the fallen flowers, and leaves of many summers, the crushed berries of many winters; the leaves of a hundred autumns, the flowers of a hundred summers, the buds of a hundred springs, the berries of a hundred winters, must be waded through before the Prince can even touch the first outreaching brambles of the hedge. As he wades through them they rise waist-high about him. He has his hand on the thorn-boughs now, and a shudder runs through the whole hedge, for every twig of it, and every leaf on every twig, knows that its time has come—that the hundred years are over. But the fairy Prince shudders, too, for he sees white bones lying here and there under the lowest boughs, and he knows them to be the bones of those adventurers who went on the quest before him, who



dreamed of the Sleeping Beauty and tried to break through her hedge, and, having failed, died there, and were forgotten by everybody except the tellers of fairy tales.

"Perhaps they felt as sure as I did," he thinks, sighing, "and they paid for being sure with their lives. Well, one can but try one's best, and there's a proverb I've heard since I came out of Fairyland—'The many fail, the one succeeds.' Shall I be the one?"

His hands are on the thorn-branches, and they crash and break asunder before him until he has forced a way through the hedge that looked so impossible to overcome. The colour comes into his face as he hurries across smooth lawns and empty terraces, where everything is asleep but his shadow; up great steps and through long stone passages, with the hope of something fair beyond all fairness flitting always before him, drawing him on as it had drawn him out of Fairyland, with a dream in the air before him and a whispering voice at his ear.

It draws him on till he is at last at the Princess's door; till, tremblingly, he has pushed open its great oaken panels, inlaid with mother-of-pearl and tortoiseshell, and stands beside the golden couch where the pale Princess lies, with her black hair sweeping down to her feet.

The heart in the Fairy Prince's breast beats like a lark held captive for a long time, and now set free and almost mad for joy. As he drops on his knees to kiss the Sleeping Beauty, his heart bursts into song—

"Love, if thy tresses be so dark,
How dark those hidden eyes must be!"

THE REVIVAL.

As the Prince kissed the Princess the last minute of the hundred years ran out, and the whole Palace awoke. Clocks, whose works and hands would have worn out fifty years before if no spell had fallen upon them to keep them young for a hundred years, began striking loudly after a century of silence. You felt they were glad to be able to hear their own voices again, for surely a dumb clock must be a misery to itself; almost as sorrowful a thing as a violin which has been put away with a broken string, and left so, forgotten, because its master or mistress was dead. Feet began to run upon echoing flags, cocks crowed merrily, taking the high noon for a particularly brilliant dawn; dogs barked and frisked about after their long, long sleep, and doors clapped cheerfully and noisily belowstairs. Everything was astir of a sudden.

The daylight grew clearer; the clouds which had gathered in the sky rolled up and disappeared; a fresh wind sprang up and frolicked through the gardens like a child chasing a butterfly. The fountain, which had sunk back to its level in the middle of the lake, sprang out of its sleep of a hundred years, and leaped up sixty feet in the sunshine, shaking itself free of dreams.

Twig by twig the hedge broke into pieces; the vines disentangled themselves and dropped into the long grass; and, branch by branch and leaf by leaf, the enchanted hedge disappeared, melting away like a burst soap-bubble or the broken pieces of a dream.

The flag on the tower lifted itself out upon the wind, blowing out its great folds of blue and gold and scarlet like an embroidered sail of three colours. The martins flew out from under the eaves to make their dinners off the flies that were dancing in the sunlight; the

butler emptied the flask he had been holding; the steward found the ink wet in his pen and finished his half-written word; the parrot screamed gleefully in his cage; and the peacock squalled on the terrace, as peacocks do when they feel rain coming, and this bird had not forgotten how to prophesy change of weather, although he had left off work of this kind for a hundred years. The page kissed the maid-of-honour, and the maid-of-honour boxed the page's ears; and, in fact, the whole palace hummed like a hive, the very walls and floors and ceilings of it glad to know themselves again for masonry after their long sleep.

Last of all, the King awoke, shifted drowsily on his throne, yawned, felt the long beard flowing down upon his knees, and sat up with a start, aroused at last.

"We have slept well and overslept ourselves, I think, my lords. See here, my beard has grown into my lap!" he said.

But all the barons said in haste, and all the knights bore them out, that the King had only had an after-dinner nap.

The King looked doubtful still, and stroked his beard.

"Maybe," he said, "yet still my joints feel stiff. Well, my Lord Chancellor, shall we pass that Bill I mentioned half-an-hour ago?"

But the Lord Chancellor could not remember what the

Bill was about, and of course it would never have done to ask the King what he was talking of; so the Lord Chancellor played with his chain of office and said a few well-chosen words about keeping the Bill for further consideration; and, to tell you the truth, that Bill never got passed at all, and nobody knew what its objects and conditions had been—not even the King himself. For memories, as well as joints, are apt to feel stiff after being out of work for a hundred years.

THE DEPARTURE.

But Bills and the perplexities of Lord Chancellors meant nothing at all to the Sleeping Beauty and the Fairy Prince who had come from so far away to wake her from her sleeping-spell and bring her out of her own world into his. She did not wait to bid her maids-of-honour good-bye; she did not tell her waiting women to pack up a single pearl necklace of her many jewels, or a single velvet robe of her many splendid gowns. She took her father's farewell kiss, and went out from the awakened palace, hand in hand with her Fairy Prince.

He put his arm round her waist, and held her hand close, for there were miry places, and slippery places, and steep places before them; and off they went together, following the sun's path, going always west. And as they went they talked about themselves, the life behind them and the life before, and how the Prince's days went in Fairyland, and if the Princess had dreamed in her sleep of a hundred years. They walked through day and night together and were never tired, and they felt the want neither of food or drink or sleep, for the one was a Fairy Prince, and the other had been an enchanted Princess long enough to make her half a fairy herself.

"Your sleep must have been very happy to last so long, Princess."

"I had only to hear your footstep, Prince, and it broke, you see. My sleep and the spell upon me knew their conqueror before I did."

"It was a happy wakening, then, Princess?"

The moon put her silver sickle through the clouds and reaped

them into great swathes of darkness; and the day died rosily away into twilight again, and still they wandered on together, following the sun. The Princess was never tired, for life was vigorous in her after its sleep of a hundred years.

"Where are we going together, Prince? To another enchanted place?" she asked of him.

"We are going together to Fairyland, my Princess; the place of all enchantments, where all wishes come true. There are stranger things in my father's court than ever happened behind your hedge of thorns over yonder, though there is no beauty there so beautiful as you."

And o'er the hills and far away,
Beyond their utmost purple rim:
Beyond the night, across the day,
Through all the world she followed him.

The May Queen.

YOU must wake and call me early to-morrow morning, mother dear, for to-morrow will be the maddest, merriest day of all good days that ever a New Year brought me. To-morrow's the first of May, and I'm to be the Queen of it, you know; Queen of the day and Queen of the May, with the other village girls for my court ladies. Margaret's tall and Caroline's small as a fairy; Margaret and Mary have eyes bright enough and cheeks rosy enough; but you see the village thinks little Alice the prettiest of them all, so I'm to be Queen of the May.

You must come to my bedside in the morning as soon as it is dawn, mother, for I should never wake, I sleep so very sound. And it would never do for me to lie late *this* morning of all mornings, would it? I've got to get up with the lark, and go gathering knots of flowers

from the hawthorns in the hedges, to make a crown and a girdle and a posy for me to wear when they make me Queen of the May.

As I came up the valley to night, whom should I meet but Robin? Sour and sad he looked, because I had given him the sharp word and the sharp look yesterday, but what cared I for that, since I'm to be Queen of the May? I think he must have taken me for a ghost, for I went by him like a flash in my white gown, and I did not speak to him or smile at him. What call had I to smile and be kind to Robin? and who dares call me cruel because my heart will only hold one thought at a time? and the thought of my heart is now that I'm to be Queen of the May to-morrow.

Robin's shy and Robin's broken-hearted for my sake, they say; but there will be bolder lads in plenty to laugh and dance with me to-morrow, and what will Robin's heart-break be to the Queen of the May?

You must wake up little Effie too, mother, for she must go to the village green with me, and carry my posy for me when I dance, and sit at the foot of my throne when they have made me the Queen. And you'll be there too, mother, to see them crown your Alice, and dance round their Queen of the May. Shepherd lads from far and wide, away from the other side of the shire, linking hands with the village lads you know.

We shall have flowers enough for our May games, but we shall want them all. The honeysuckle round our porch is out and ready, and the lilac-coloured cuckoo-flowers are in bloom out in the water-meadows, and out yonder in the marshes the marsh marigold shines like fire. And I shall want them all, mother, for I'm to be Queen of the May. Look what a lovely night it is! There will be no rain to-morrow—not a drop the livelong day. The winds have said it—did you hear them?—as they move softly to and fro on the meadow-grass; and the stars know it, and look brightly down upon me—all the brighter because I am so happy. The world will be so fair to-morrow to me, mother; the valley will look all fresh and green and still, and the hill is yellow with cowslips and crowfoot, and the brook will go dancing down the dale, because I'm to be Queen of the May. So be sure you

are stirring early enough to call me up with the dawn to-morrow, mother dear, for sad and sorry would I be to be a lie-abed when the sun wakes up on Mayday morning, the happiest morning in all the gay new year, the very happiest morning of my whole life.

There'll be a Maypole set up on the village green, all decked with long streamers of ribbon and ropes of flowers, and the girls and boys will take hands and dance round it in a ring, singing a May song. And some girls will wear cowslips in their hair, and carry cowslip-balls, and some will have wreaths of crowfoot and marsh marigold. But only one girl will wear a garland of hawthorn, and that will be your own little Alice, mother, for I'm to be Queen of the May.

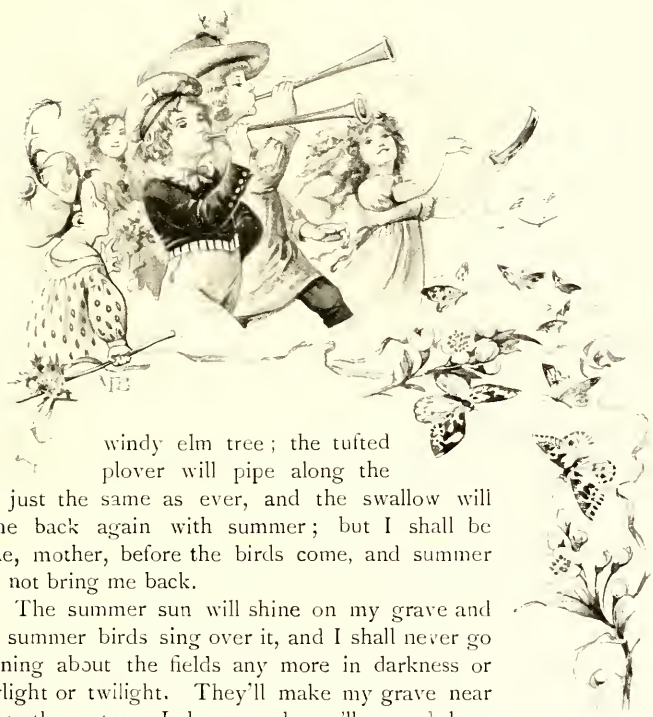
NEW YEAR'S EVE.

If you're waking, call me early, very early, mother, that I may see the sun rise on the last New Year's Day that I shall ever know.

I watched him set to-night, the round red sun, and with him I said good-bye to the dear old year, the happy old year when I had health of body and peace of mind. The old year's almost dead, and the new year's coming fast, but I shall never see the blackthorn out in blossom again, or the new leaves on the trees. Last May we were all so merry; they twisted a crown of flowers for me and made me Queen of the May. My throne was under the maypole itself, and they danced merrily around me; and oh, how gay was I at the dance, and how ready at the singing! We wound our dances in and out, and round about, round the maypole and over the green and into the little hazel-tree wood, and we never thought of stopping till those stars they call Charles's Wain came out and looked down on us from their places ever so high above tree tops and chimney tops.

There was great plenty of flowers then: now there is not a flower to be seen in all the hills. The frost makes flower-pictures on the pane, but there are no other flowers to see. Oh, mother, I do so want to live till the snowdrops come again! I wish the snow would melt away, and the kind, bright sun come out again, and let the flowers blossom. I want to see a flower again before I die.

The rook will build again and call again from his nook in the



windy elm tree; the tufted plover will pipe along the lea just the same as ever, and the swallow will come back again with summer; but I shall be gone, mother, before the birds come, and summer will not bring me back.

The summer sun will shine on my grave and the summer birds sing over it, and I shall never go running about the fields any more in darkness or daylight or twilight. They'll make my grave near a hawthorn tree, I hope, and you'll come there sometimes to look at the little green place swelling up in the soft green grass.

I've been a wild and wayward child, but you'll kiss me and forgive me, mother; and don't fret for me, for you have Effie yet, and she'll be a better daughter to you than ever I have been. She can have the gardening tools I used—they're on the granary floor; they shall be her very own from to-day, for I shall never do any more gardening.

She can look to the rose-bush that I set to grow about the parlour

window, and tell her to mind the box of mignonette—it's no easy plant to tend.

Good-night, dear mother; call me when you see the dawn is coming. I lie awake all night long, but I fall asleep when it's morning; and to-morrow I want with all my heart to see the sun rise on the new year. So wake and call me early, lest I miss it in my sleep.

CONCLUSION.

I THOUGHT I should have died before, and yet here I am, still alive, and able to hear the bleating of the lambs as they run beside their mothers down yonder in the fields. I was so sad on New Year's Day, for I thought that I should die before the snowdrops came, and now the snowdrops have died before me, and the violets are here.

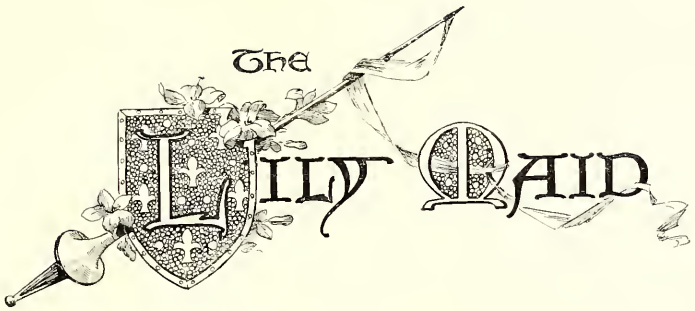
The violet's sweet under the soft spring skies, but sweeter far than the violet is the sound of the lambs to me that cannot rise from my bed and look down at them from my window. The countryside is sweet with growing things, and sweeter than the smell of the new grass is the thought of dying to me, that once so feared it. I felt it bitterly hard to go away from the face of the sun, and now I find it hard to stay here, sick and weak and weary as I am. But I shan't be long sick or long weary now, mother; and while I wait, that good man, our clergyman, has given me words of peace to think about. God bless his kind voice and silver hair! God bless him all his life long until he joins me in heaven! I blessed him in my heart, as I bless him now out loud, when he knelt beside my bed, mother, and prayed for me. He showed me my sins and he told me all God's mercy, and though I lighted my lamp late, he says it shall not be darkened, and I shall be let in to heaven.

I don't want to live now, mother, Heaven seems so near to me, and Him that died for me I want so much to see. I had a sign last night when the night and morning meet; the moon was setting and the trees began to whisper in the wind, and there was no light anywhere in the sky. Then a wonderful and beautiful thing happened. All in the wild March morning, mother, I heard the angels calling to my soul. I was lying broad awake, thinking how lonely you and Effie would feel

when the house was empty of me. I prayed for you both, and when I left off praying I heard a sweet and wonderful music come up on the wind as it swept up our valley. You were sound asleep, you and Effie, and at first I thought I was dreaming; but it came again and once again, and the last time it sounded close under the window, and then went lifting up to heaven, and was lost among the stars. So I think I have not much longer to lie here and grow weary of my bed. I shall soon go the way that beautiful music went, and I would not be sorry if I followed it to-day. But Effie must comfort you, mother, when she's your only child. And she'll say a kind word to poor Robin for me, and tell him not to fret for me. He'll live to be happy yet with some kinder and gentler girl than I would ever have been if I had lived to be his wife, as I might have been, perhaps.

Look, there's the bright sun up at last, and the sky is all in a glow! He is shining down on a hundred fields, and I know every one

of them, though they forget me because I walk and run in them no more, and other hands than mine pick their wild flowers. But there are flowers and fields in heaven, where perhaps I shall be to-night, and to know them once is to know them for ever. For ever and for ever in the blessedest home of all I shall be, and soon you and Effie will come, and we shall all rest in the light of God, mother, as now I do, shutting my eyes and turning myself to sleep upon your breast.



WHAT did the Lily Maid want with a knight's great shield up in her chamber in the east tower of her father's castle? Listen and I will tell you.

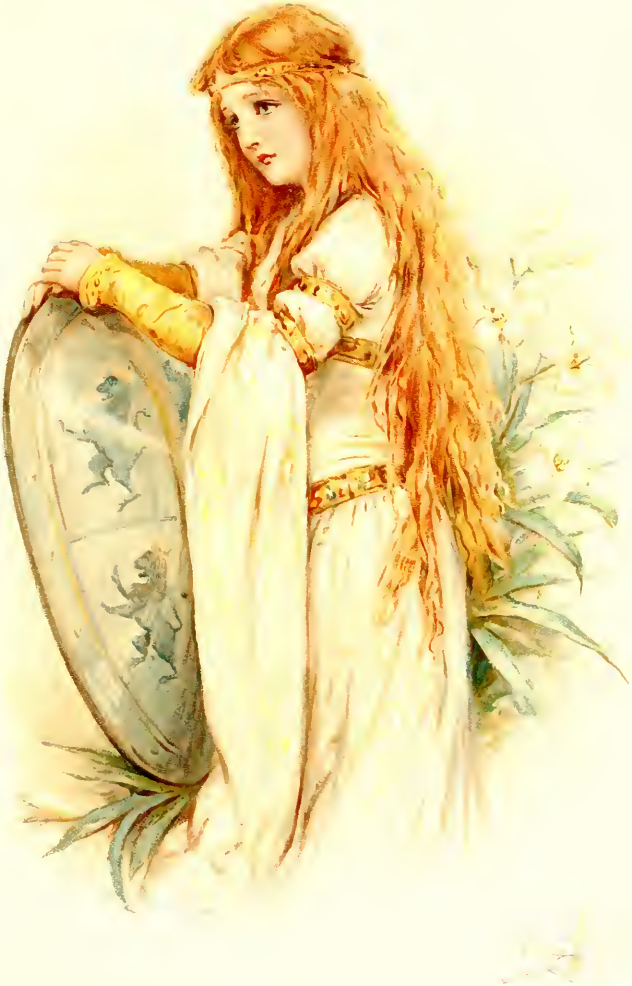
Her name was Elaine, and because she was white as the flowers in her garden, gold-crested like those same flowers, the people who knew her and loved her called her Lily-Maid.

She was the youngest of three, a motherless only daughter, dearly beloved of her father, the Lord of Astolat, and his two strong sons, Torre and Lavaine. She lived alone with them in a lonely castle set deep in green dales and downs, where few travellers ever came, and few tidings of great doings were ever heard, though the whole of England was then full of great doings from end to end, for it was in the noble days of King Arthur, and there were giants still in the land, and fairies danced of nights in the valleys and dingles. The castle was so lonely that it was missed even by knights in quest of adventures. It chanced once to be come upon by Sir Lancelot riding alone to a great tournament —that was a sham battle between knights for some rich prize that would be sometimes a great diamond, as it was now—Sir Lancelot riding alone across the downs would never have seen the castle of

Astolat if he had not lost his way. Coming upon it in the middle of the downs he rested there for the night, ate, drank, slept, and was made welcome. Now he did not want to be known for Lancelot at the tournament; he desired only to go there and do battle for the diamond as a plain knight, carrying a plain shield that would not tell everyone who he was, as his own shield did, and as shields were meant to do in those days. The Lord of Astolat's eldest son had been hurt in his first encounter with a knight, and so his shield was blank, and this shield of Sir Torre's was borrowed by Sir Lancelot, who promised to bring it back and take away his own, which meanwhile was taken care of by Elaine.

She put it in her own room where the first ray of sunlight would strike upon it in the morning, and she made and embroidered a case for it, that it might not get soiled or rusty. She sewed upon the case all the devices that were painted on the shield in their own proper colours, and then around it she made a border of needlework after her own fancy—branches and flowers and nests, and birds in the nests.

Not only this did she do, but every day she sat alone in her room



with the shield for a little time, taking off the silk case she had made for it, and studying the pictures or devices on it, the dents it bore, and the scratches of lances and spears.

"Here was a dreadful stroke," she said to herself, brooding over some deep dint that a sword had beaten into it. "That was not done in play; it was in deadly earnest, and might have killed him, but that God was kind and broke the strong lance that crashed against him, or splintered the great sword that was raised to hew him down. That cut is fresh. . . . That scratch is a new one, too; that one is old, that other older yet. These marks were made at Camelot, perhaps—or at Caerleon, or at Caerlyle, and this mark is ten years old. I was a baby then, and could scarcely be trusted to run about alone, while he was giving and taking these mighty blows."

So she pleased herself with her lonely thoughts, and was glad to think that Sir Lancelot had carried with him in his helmet her parting gift, a red sleeve sewn with seed pearls.

And while she sat and dreamed about the shield and the shield's master, her brother Lavaine and Sir Lancelot rode to the tournament together.

They rode across the swelling shoulders of the great green downs together, and slept for the night in a cell scooped in the chalk rock by

a hermit who had once been a knight, and known the beautiful city of Camelot as now Lancelot knew it. They slept and breakfasted in the white chalk cell, and heard morning prayers before they got in their horses from the meadow where they had cast them loose over night, and then they rode away together. And as they rode Sir Lancelot told young Lavaine who he was.

"I do not wish my name to be known or my face to be shown to-day," he said, "but to you I tell it that you ride with Lancelot of the Lake." Lavaine was so surprised and abashed with delight at knowing this secret that he could only stammer—

"Are you he indeed? The great Lancelot?" Then he got his breath and went on. "I have seen one, then, of the world's two noblest knights. And the other is our Lord the King, Pendragon's son and King of Britain. I shall see him, too, to-day, for he will be there to judge the fortunes of the day at the tournament. Why, if I were to be struck blind this night, having seen Arthur and you, I could say that I had seen." But Lancelot did not answer him. Lavaine talked as they rode, but when they reached Camelot his eyes were busier than his tongue. The lists were set up in a meadow just outside the city bounds —that is to say, fences and barriers marked off a clear space for the knights on their horses to ride at one another and be kept clear of the people who thronged to see them tilt together. There was a gallery full of seats which ran half round the course, and here the colours of ladies' gowns and knights' mantles made the place look like a rainbow lying fallen on the grass. Here sat the King, splendid in red samite or silk, easy to be known for the King, since on his crown he wore the golden dragon of Pendragon, and dragons were worked n gold thread on his crimson robes. The chair he sat in was all of dragons carved in gilded wood, twisted and writhing and plaited together, and the arms of the chair ended in dragons' heads. In the canopy over his head there was set the prize of the tournament—a splendid diamond.

Lancelot answered young Lavaine then. "Did you call me great? There is nothing great in me, unless it be some far-off touch of greatness to know that I am not great. There sits the great man of us two," and he pointed to the King. Then there was no more time for talking, for

the trumpets blew the call to arms. The knights set their lances in rest and charged furiously together, and the earth shook under the shock of their meeting and the trampling of their horses; the air was filled with the clashing of their armour, and the noise of their battle-cries; but Sir Lancelot, having chosen the weaker side for his own, cried no war-cry, but rode silently into the fight. Great blows were struck by him, and great blows taken; and all wondered at the strong arm of the knight with the plain shield, who wore a lady's scarlet sleeve in his helmet for a favour, and kept closed his vizor (the face part of the helmet). "It ought to be our Lancelot," said Lancelot's friends and cousins one to another; "but when did Lancelot ever wear a lady's favour in his helm?" Jealous for Lancelot's sake, they all charged down upon the strange knight. As a great wave bears down on a fisherman's boat in the North Sea and heels it over, fisherman and craft together, so they overwhelmed Sir Lancelot, lamed his horse and flung him down, and a lance-head stabbed him

in the side, and broke there. But Lavaine came to Lancelot's help with a fresh horse, and the weaker side Lancelot fought for drew together, and, wounded as he was, Sir Lancelot drove back his kith and kin to the barrier. Then the trumpets blew, proclaiming him to be the conqueror; but Lancelot would not wait to take the diamond that he had won. Said he:

"I must go, and I will not be followed. I want no diamond; I have got death for my prize." He rode quickly away with young Lavaine into the Downs, and when they were near the hermit's cell in the chalk, where poplar-trees made a groove about them, he slipped out of the saddle and told Sir Lavaine to draw the spear-head from his side. Lavaine obeyed, though much afraid that Sir Lancelot would die, the bleeding was so great. The hermit who had been a knight came out and carried the wounded man to his cell, and there for many weeks he nursed Sir Lancelot tenderly.

Now, at the tournament-field which he had just left, the King was asking for the conqueror.

"He is gone, Sire," said the knights on whose side Lancelot had fought. "He was wounded, and he has gone without his diamond, saying that his prize was death."

"He must not die," said the King. "He is so great a knight that twenty times I thought he must be Lancelot, and he must not ride away from us, hurt and alone. Go after him, Gawain; take the road he went, and follow him until you find him, and give him the diamond." Sir Gawain was sulky at losing the feast and the merry-making to follow for the sake of an unknown knight, but he said nothing, fearing Arthur's anger. He took the diamond and rode away to make search for the strange knight, but missed the hermit's cell, and came at last to Astolat.

"What news from the tournament, my lord?" cried Elaine to him from the gate. "What of the knight with the red sleeve?"

"He won the diamond, but was hurt in the side." Elaine cried out with her hand to her own side, as if the spear had pricked her there, too, and her father came out to hear the news and welcome in the guest. Gawain was shown the shield with Lancelot's arms upon

it; and when he saw the blue lions rampant on the golden field, he knew it at once for Lancelot's.

"Well, damsel," said he to Elaine, "truly it is Sir Lancelot. Since he wore your colours in the fight, and I make no doubt you know where he lies hidden to get healed of his wound, I give the diamond to you. Give it to him, and so good-bye. Maybe you will come to the court and we shall meet again." And, tired of the quest, Sir Gawain kissed Elaine's hand and rode away, returning to Camelot, where the King was angry to see him come back without having seen Lancelot face to face and given the diamond into Lancelot's own hand.

Elaine, left behind with the diamond in her charge, went to her father and clung to him and petted him, saying, "You have called me often wilful; now give me my will lest I should lose my wits. I must go and find Sir Lancelot and give him his diamond. I will be more faithful in my quest than Sir Gawain has been in his. Oh, father, I have seen Sir Lancelot in a dream, looking the very shadow of himself—so gaunt and pale with sickness that my heart is breaking till I can find him and nurse him back to life again. Dear father, let me go."

"Well, you must give the diamond. Yes, you may go." Her father nodded and smiled at her eager face. "Being so very wilful, you must go." And while she made ready for her ride and her search, his last sentence rang in her ears, changed in one word only.

"Being so very wilful, you must die." She laughed the thought away, and rode out with Sir Torre over the Downs to Camelot. Just outside the city gates they came upon Lavaine, exercising his horse in a flowery meadow. "How goes it with Sir Lancelot?" she cried. Sir Torre went on into the city to some kindred of his who lived there, while Lavaine led Elaine to the caves in the chalk cliff; and here she found Sir Lancelot lying wasted with sickness and fever and the pain of his wound. She cried out with pity to see him, and her cry awoke him. "Here is the diamond sent you by the King," she said. And when she had told him all about the coming of Gawain, and the reason why the diamond had been entrusted to her, she put

it into his hand, and he gave her a kiss of thanks. After that Elaine went to her people in Camelot, but came to the chalk caves every day to nurse Sir Lancelot, until the hermit told her that her care and tenderness had saved the great knight's life. When he was stronger, she and Lavaine and Lancelot rode back to Astolat, and there Sir Lancelot stayed some days. But the world called him, and the workaday life of the world, and he took his shield from Elaine's keeping, leaving her only the case she had made for it, and he rode away one evening at sunset without saying good-bye to her, because his going was so heavy a sorrow to her, that to say farewell in thought almost drove her mad. She wanted so much to be his squire or his servant, and travel through the world with him; but that could never be.

She sat in her tower looking at the empty shield case; day after day she sat there doing nothing but grieve. Her brothers tried to comfort her, but they could not. Her father tried to coax her back to joy, but Elaine's spirit was broken within her. She had strange dreams at night, and by day she sang strange songs, and here is one she sang:—

"Sweet is true love, tho' given in vain, in vain;
And sweet is death who puts an end to pain:
I know not which is sweeter, no, nor I.
Love, art thou sweet? then bitter death must be;
Love, thou art bitter; sweet is death to me.
O Love, if death be sweeter, let me die.
Sweet love, that seems not made to fade away;
Sweet death, that seems to make us loveless clay,
I know not which is sweeter, no, not I.
I fain would follow love, if that could be;
I needs must follow death, who calls for me;
Call and I follow, I follow! let me die."

She told a dream she had had to her father and brothers as they stood round her bed one day.

"I dreamed of the river going up to Camelot, and the cape with the poplar on it, where you used to turn the boat and come home again. When we were children together we often rowed as far as the cape, and I used to cry because you would not row me on up to Camelot. Well, I dreamed I went past the cape all alone in my boat, and again I wanted to go up with the tide into Camelot as far as the King's palace. But I awoke before my boat had gone so far. I am dying, but still I want to sail up the river to Camelot, to see the King's palace, and the Queen, and Sir Lancelot who went away and never said good-bye."

"To Camelot?" said her father; "dear child, you are too weak."

"I shall be strong enough, for I shall be dead," Elaine said. Then she whispered to her father how her heart was set on this, her last whim, and he promised that she should have her own way once more. A few days later she died Then her brothers carried her down to a barge hung with black that waited in the river for her, and they laid her there in her own bed that had been covered with a quilt of cloth of gold. They put a lily in her hand, hung the shield-case over her head, kissed her dead face, and said good-bye, and the dumb man who was gate-keeper at Astolat, took the oars in his hands and rowed her up the river to Camelot.

Now this day, when Elaine of Astolat took her last journey, was the day when Lancelot had gone to the palace to give to Guinevere the Queen, King Arthur's wife, the diamond he had won at

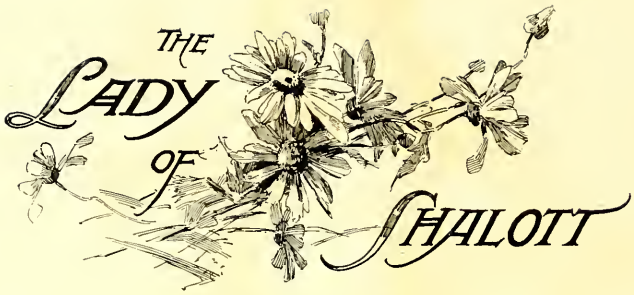
the tournament. But something had made the Queen angry, and she took the diamond and flung it out of the window at which she stood. Sir Lancelot stood at the window, too, and as the diamond flashed down into the river below, there came slowly by the black barge, with the dumb man rowing it, and the Lily Maid lying white amid her golden hair, with a letter in her right hand.

The barge stopped at the water-gate of the palace, and there knights were sent out by the King to carry in dead Elaine; and Queen Guinevere came, wondering and pitying, and Lancelot came, sorrowing, and looked at her; and, lastly, the King came, and seeing the letter in her hand, opened it and read it. The letter said :—

"Most noble lord, Sir Lancelot of the Lake,
I, sometime called the Maid of Astolat,
Come, for you left me taking no farewell,
Hither, to take my last farewell of you.
I loved you, and my love had no return,
And therefore my true love has been my death.
And therefore to our Lady Guinevere,
And to all other ladies I make moan :
Pray for my soul, and yield me burial.
Pray for my soul thou too, Sir Lancelot,
As thou art a knight peerless."

The court ladies sighed, and the knights pitied the Lily Maid; and Guinevere shed tears for her, while Sir Lancelot told of her how fair and sweet and tender she had been.

And then they carried her to the greatest church in Camelot, and there they buried her, not like a simple maiden, but like a queen, with funeral masses and many candles and rolling music. And Sir Lancelot had a splendid tomb made for her, and a white marble statue of her was sculptured on it with a marble lily in her hand, and Lancelot's shield, cut in stone, at her feet. And round about the tomb her story was written in letters of gold. And that is all I have to tell of the Lily Maid of Astolat.



LONG fields lie on either side of the river clothed in their season with waving crops of bearded barley and rye, over which the wind runs as it does over the surface of the sea, making ripple after ripple as the long ears bend and bow and lift themselves again aloft in the sunshine. Through these fields runs the road to Camelot, the great city, the strong city, the beautiful city of King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table; and the people who come and travel to and fro by this road see an island in the middle of the river, where the lilies and their great green pods grow so thickly in water-lily time.

This island is the island of Shalott. Willows whiten around it, aspens quiver there even when no wind is blowing, and when the wind is up, even though it be ever so small a breeze, the water lightens and darkens as the whisper comes and goes. In the middle of the island there is a flower-garden, walled in with four high walls of grey stone, and in the garden stands a castle, with four grey towers, and in this castle lives the Lady of Shalott.

Along the river-banks slide heavy barges, drawn by slow horses; they carry great burdens of timber and stone, store of fish caught in the rivers and fish drawn from the sea, produce of orchards and fruit-

gardens, the rapid work of the seasons and the slow work of men's hands; and to the men and women on the barges going down to Camelot, men and women working in the fields and travelling on the high road, call out and wave hands in greeting—but no hand is waved and no voice cries out from the island in salutation to barge or pleasure boat. No one ever stands at any window of the four towers of Shalott; and the latest gleaners and the earliest bargemen have never seen the lady who is mistress of the castle on the island in the river.

Only reapers have heard sometimes in the grey of the morning a song come trilling down to them where they work cutting and stacking the sheaves of bearded barley. They never see the singer, but the voice is a woman's voice, clear and sweet as running water, and it comes from the castle on the island, whose gate none of them has ever passed, and they know it is the Lady of Shalott singing in her tower. Of moonlit nights, too, when the harvest is late and the harvesters are

working against time to cut and carry the sheaves before rain falls to spoil and sodden them—then, too, there is heard a strange and wonderful singing, and the tired reapers stop to listen, and, half afraid, whisper one to another, "It is the fairy Lady of Shalott."

II.

There, in her castle on the lonely island, shut in with water and water-lilies from the rest of the world, the Lady of Shalott lives a strange and a lonely life. Night and day she sits at her loom weaving upon it a magic web. Rest and sleep are not for her by night, pleasure and the stir of young life are not for her by day: she is the enchanted mistress of an enchanted castle, and high up in her room in one of the towers she sits weaving steadily a web full of magic colours.

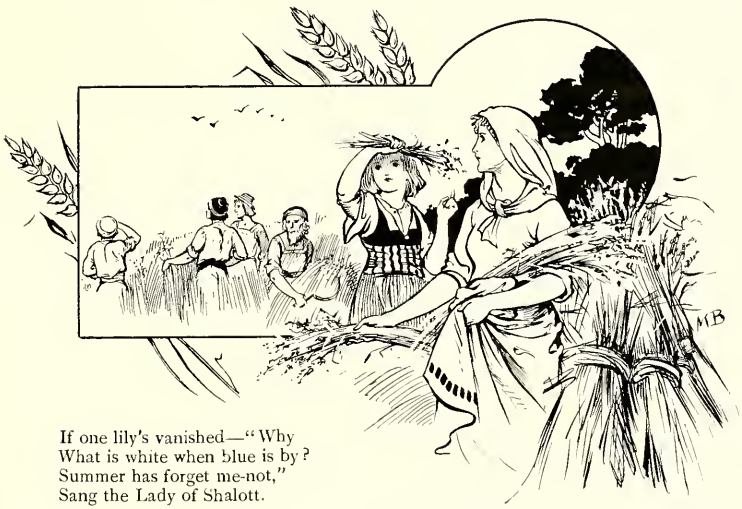
She never stays to look out of her window, to see if the willows are dipping their long green hair into water crowded with water-lilies, or if the time of the lilies is over, and the trees are putting on the gold and scarlet livery of Autumn, or if the swallows have new-come in the train of green-coated Spring, or if the water runs dull and grey under the breath of Winter. She has heard that she must not stop in her weaving: she has woven so long and lived so long alone that she has forgotten who told her; but in her heart she knows, and in her brain she remembers, that she must never leave her work to look down the river to Camelot lest a curse should fall upon her. What that curse is she does not know, but she guesses that it would be strange and terrible; and, therefore, she keeps her mind and her heart and her eyes fixed only on the web she is weaving, and so that the threads run smoothly and evenly in her work, and so that the colours of the pattern stand out separately, clear, and beautiful, she has no other care in life. She does not need to rise and look out of the window to see the everyday life that lies beyond and around her island, for in front of her, as she sits at her loom, there hangs a great round mirror, in which she sees, passing before her, shadows of the outside world.

There she sees the road that leads to Camelot, and the people that pass to and fro by it—sturdy and surly churls from the villages, and girls in gay red cloaks going to buy and sell in the city market, and the eddying waters of the river that girdles her own little lonely island. Sometimes the mirror shows her a troop of merry girls singing and laughing and talking gaily together; sometimes a fat old abbot on his ambling pad-horse, half-asleep in his saddle; sometimes a shepherd boy, bare-headed, bare-footed, and clad in a coat of sheepskin stained with the passage of many weathers, foul and fair; and sometimes a pretty page in a suit of scarlet, decked out in Court finery, with a feather in his cap and a dagger at his side, and a gay cloak upon his shoulders. The girls and the abbot, and the shepherd and the page, go by on their way to Camelot, and the Lady of Shalott forgets them; but sometimes her mirror shows her knights in splendid armour, riding two and two, and these do not pass out of her mind as easily as they pass

out of her mirror. For these have all sweet ladies to love and fight for—ladies who give them gloves and ribbons as favours to wear in their helmets at tournaments and on pitched fields of battle, and no loyal knight in all the world has ever asked to wear the colours of the Lady of Shalott.

Here she grows up all alone
In her towers of grey stone
Like a flower that is unknown
Of the summer wind that shakes it
And the winter wind that breaks it.
Like a lily growing lone
By some great grey burial stone
Where no mourner e'er makes moan

So she blooms and is forgot
This pale Lady of Shalott.
Other lilies take the air
With their sweetness debonnair,
And the world sees they are fair.
No one sees her eyes are bright
As the wheeling stars at night.
Like a star that none sees rise,
Wan she moves amid the skies,
Falls, and no one knows she dies.
Who should for one star the less
Lose one throb of happiness?
Star and flower live and die
To themselves, and none descry
One less sparkle in the sky,
One less lily.. Day is high
Though one star to death has shot—



If one lily's vanished—"Why
What is white when blue is by?
Summer has forget me-not,"
Sang the Lady of Shalott.

But she did not always sing over her weaving even such a song as this that I who tell you about her have made for her to sing.

Sometimes she sat silent, tired of the sight of the happy life from which her towers shut her in, and angry with her own fancy which had made her repeat in her web all the sights her mirror showed her. And sometimes she sighed, seeing in her glass and working in her web a funeral of some gallant knight or fair lady, all black cloths and silver fringes, red torchlight, pacing monks, and solemn music, going down to Camelot there to bury their dead. And sometimes she did not sigh or sit silent, but grew angry, seeing in her looking-glass a happy wife and husband, walking free in the moonlight, with no curse to fear and no towers to shut them in. Then her loom would stop, and her dark eyes would grow angry as they looked into her mirror for comfort that was not there for her, and she would cry out to the walls that hemmed her round, " I am half sick of shadows."

III.

At last another knight came shining down the road to Camelot. Hardly the length of an arrow's flight from the tower-windows of Shalott, he rode along the King's highway, between the sheaves of ripened barley. The sun shone dazzlingly down through the leaves of oak and beech, and made his armour flash like a flame of fire. His shield was broad and golden like a harvest moon, and there was a gaily-coloured cognizance upon it—and that means the picture painted upon it, for in far-off days when knights wore their helmets closed, they could only be known, foe from friend, by the colour and the paintings upon the shields they carried to defend themselves from attack.

The picture upon this, Sir Lancelot's, shield—his name, Lancelot, had been given to him by his fairy godmother, the Lady of the Lake—was a Red Cross Knight kneeling to a lady. The bridle of his horse was set with jewels of fair colours, as bright as a branch of stars that one sees shining at night overhead in its fixed quarter of the heavens. Besides the jewels there were bells on this bridle, and they rang little joy-peals as the horse trotted along the road to Camelot. From the belt across the knight's breast hung a great silver bugle, and the bells clashed together, and the jewels flashed, and the knight's armour rang as he rode upon his way under the blue spring sky and the golden sunshine that made the armour and trappings of man and horse gleam until

> "The helmet and the helmet-feather,
> Burn'd like one burning flame together,
> As he rode down to Camelot."

The horse's hoofs shone like burnished silver; the knight's forehead shone in the sunshine, and his coal-black curly hair flowed down from underneath his helmet; and like a beam of sunlight he flashed along the river bank, and flashed into the mirror of the Lady of Shalott.

"Tirra-tirra!" he sang as he rode; and the Lady at the loom heard him as she sat. She sprang up from her stool, she left web and

loom, and took three steps to the window. There she stood, looking down on the river and the water lilies, and the knight in shining helmet and waving plume. She looked at him, and she looked down the way he was going—the road to Camelot.

The web broke away from the loom and floated wide, like a bit of gossamer in autumn; the mirror cracked and splintered from side to side, and the shivers of glass fell at the weaver's feet.

"The curse has fallen upon me!" cried the Lady of Shalott.

IV.

The broad river was complaining drearily as he ran between his banks; the forest trees were creaking and tossing their great boughs about on the furious east wind that swept down upon them, shrieking.

out of a rainy sky, and stabbing them through and through as with a knife, and slashing their leaves down in their thousands to the sodden ground below them. And the rain fell drearily, drearily over towered Camelot, and over lone Shalott, while a pale lady came down to the island bank of the river, and found there a boat afloat under a willow-tree. She baled it free of water, and with a piece of charred wood she wrote on the boat's white prow her name, "The Lady of Shalott."

Then she stepped into it, loosed the chain that held it to the landing place under the willow-tree, and as the little boat floated out into mid-stream, she lay down in it, while the leaves dropped upon her loose hair and pale face and white gown. Then the river carried her gently down to Camelot.

Tree after tree dropped its leaves softly upon her, like tears for her long loneliness and the strange spell that had fallen upon her; and all along the river the trees and the water-fowl, and the few people who were afoot that wild and rainy night, heard her singing as she went down to

Camelot. Long she sang, and low she sang, and she sang very sweetly and very strangely and very sadly, like the swan that sings before he dies, and at no other time in all his life. And this was her swan-song, for before the tide brought her abreast of the first houses on the waterside, she died in the middle of her singing; and so she never saw Camelot. The boat floated on up into the heart of the city, with the dead lady lying upon it, and many people came to look upon it as it went with the tide through Camelot, and stopped at the gates of King Arthur's palace. Knights and ladies came out from the banquet, and they all came to look at the dead lady in the little boat, and all of them wondered who she was.

Last of all came Sir Lancelot, whom she had seen, looking down from her window at Shalott, the day when the curse fell and the mirror broke.

He had never seen her, though she had seen him, and for a little while he was silent and sorry, because she was beautiful, and she was dead. Then he read the name she had written round the prow of the boat. He said:

"She has a lovely face;
God in His mercy lend her grace,
The Lady of Shalott!"

Lady Clare.

IT was about the time when lilies blow and Spring sits under fruit-trees, thick with blossom, and dreams of Summer and Autumn—it was just at this pleasant time of the year that Lord Ronald brought a lily-white doe that he had tamed to feed from his hand, and gave it to his cousin, Lady Clare.

Pleased enough was she with the pretty gift and the pretty creature; and, indeed, any gift would have been dear to her from Ronald's hand, for he and Clare had long been lovers, and to-morrow they would be married, and dearly happy they hoped to be together. "He does not love me because I am a rich woman," said Lady Clare

"I might be a poor girl and welcome, and no matter, for Ronald loves me for myself, and will love me so for ever." She walked about her room as she spoke, and looked now at the dress and now at the veil she was to wear to-morrow as a bride.

Then she turned away from them to Alice, her old nurse, who had followed her into the room.

"Who went from here just now, my bird?" asked Alice.

"It was my cousin, Lord Ronald," said Lady Clare, smiling, and blushing. "He brought me a white doe, and that is the last gift he will give me as Lady Clare. After to-morrow what he gives me will be given to his wife."

Nurse Alice flushed too, but she did not smile. "Oh, God be thanked that all has come round so just and fair," she cried.

"What is this you are saying of justice and fairness, nurse? It is love and marriage between us two," said Lady Clare.

"I meant nothing else, my bird."

"Yes, you did. And I must needs know what you meant at once," said Lady Clare.

Alice wrung her hands. "Why will you want so old a story?"

"Tell me at once," said pale Lady Clare. And Alice trembled and told.

"I said 'Thank God that all has worked out so just and fair!' because—because—oh, child! Lord Ronald is not only heir of half the county, but he is master of all your lands as well, and you are not the Lady Clare."

"Are you gone mad?" said Lady Clare. And Alice wept and trembled more.

"By all that's good, I do but speak the truth at last. If you will have it—you are not the Lady Clare: you are my child. I was nurse to the old Earl's daughter, and she died in my arms, poor babe! I speak the truth as I live by bread! She died in my arms, and my baby girl was well and strong. I buried the old Earl's daughter like my own sweet child in the grave where my goodman lies, and I put my own child in her place. And nobody ever knew."

"That was a dreadful deed to do, mother," said she who was no

longer Lady Clare. "How had you the heart to put your baby in the Earl's daughter's cradle? How had you the heart to keep the best man under the sun out of his rights these many years?"

"Don't speak so loud," said Nurse Alice in terror. "Speak low, or speak not at all, my child; but lock the secret up in your heart as I wish I had locked it up in mine for ever, and all will come right by to-morrow; for all that you have—every rood of ground, every brick and stone in this house—will be Lord Ronald's when he and you are man and wife."

"If I'm a beggar born," said her daughter, "the world shall surely know it. You may have lied for me, mother; but I will not lie for myself. I must and I will speak out this very day."

And she undid the diamond necklace that was round her throat, and unpinned the gold brooch she wore.

"What are you doing, my bird? Keep the secret even only a little while longer—a month? a week? a day?"

"No," said her daughter. "I will try what man's faith is like."

"Faith? Surely the man will cleave to the lands and home that are his by right if ye tell him they are his," sobbed Alice.

"And he shall have his rights," said she who had been the Lady Clare, "though I should die to-night for giving them back to him."

"Go to him then if you *will* go, but give me one kiss first," pleaded the old nurse. "I am your mother, child, after all. And O, my pretty one, I sinned for the love of you!"

"It is all so strange," said Alice's daughter, but she turned and kissed the old woman's sobbing mouth. "But here's your kiss for you, mother; and now put your hand upon my head, mother, and say 'God bless you,' before I go."

She changed her rich silk dress for a brown stuff gown, such as Lady Clare would never have put on, but was good enough for Alice's daughter, and she went out through dale and over down, seeking her cousin, with a red rose in her hand and a white rose in her hair.

The white doe Lord Ronald had given her, seeing her pass, rose from her bed in the fern, dropped her head to take a caress from her mistress's hand, and followed her all the way to Lord Ronald's home.

Lord Ronald had seen her coming, and he hastened down to meet her.

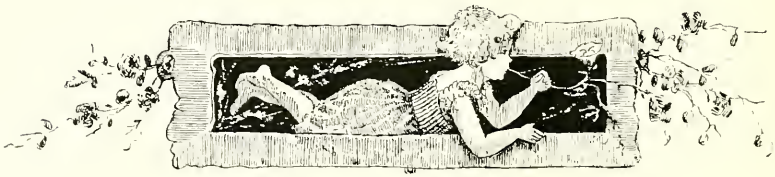
"Why, Lady Clare, what trick of yours is this to come dressed like a village girl on a working day? You are the flower of all the earth, and you should be dressed as finely as a flower."

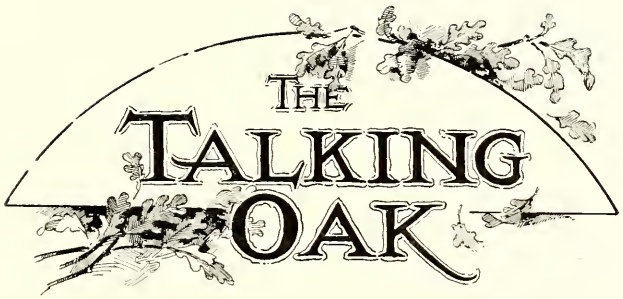
"If I come dressed like a village girl, I am dressed to fit my fortunes, changed as they are," said she. "I am a beggar born, and not a flower; I am not even Lady Clare."

"Play me no tricks," said Lord Ronald, "and bring me no riddle I cannot read. Tell me in plain words what it is that has happened, for you are mine, and I am yours, and we will speak truth one to another."

She stood up proudly then, and looked him fairly and squarely in the eyes. High of courage she stood there, facing him, and told him what her nurse had that morning confessed to her. When she had done Lord Ronald laughed.

Then he turned and kissed her where she stood. "If all this story is true," he said, "and not an old wife's tale, even then there is no harm done. If you are not the heiress born of all these lands that the old Earl held; if these hills and dales are mine instead of yours, to-morrow they shall be yours as well as mine. For you and I will be married to-morrow; so you shall still be Lady Clare."

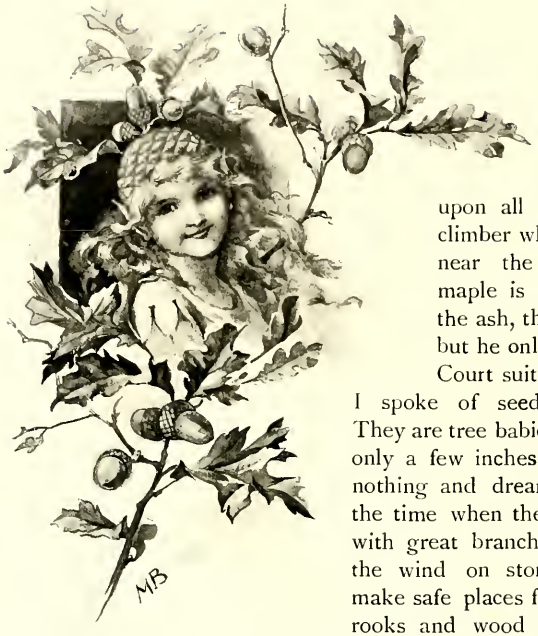




DID you ever hear of an oak that talked? Never? Well, I know of one. He grows in a green loneliness, with no other oaks near, except the seedlings at his feet which have sprouted from his own dropped acorns. I used to talk to him by the hour together, and we were excellent friends, he and I. There he stands yonder, a giant in a brown coat, with green sleeves and green cap.

The tall fern covers him to his knees, and his topmost branches look out over the green stretches of park-land to the roofs of Sumner Place, the home of the prettiest girl in the world. And *her* name is Olive.

"Friend Oak, do you remember her? Have your boughs ever shaded a sweeter face?" He does not answer. Perhaps he is asleep, or perhaps he is sulky or angry. Trees have tempers of their own. The elm is a very short-tempered tree, and so is the holly; and where one tree, the birch, will be a dainty lady, in a gown of silver stuff, another, the hornbeam, will be a squat, stout country fellow, with a dark coat upon his back and never a piece of silver lace about him.



The beech is a splendid soldier, tall and beautiful and stately; and the pine is a sailor, who has sailed upon all seas, and a hill-climber who has gone very near the sky; and the maple is a Court page to the ash, the queen of trees, but he only puts his scarlet Court suit on in the autumn. I spoke of seedlings just now. They are tree babies, little creatures only a few inches high, that know nothing and dream nothing about the time when they will be giants, with great branches that creak in the wind on stormy nights, and make safe places for the nests that rooks and wood pigeons build in them. But to return to our Oak. Let me try if he will answer me now.

"Oak, old Oak, do you remember me? I am that Walter who once carved Olivia's name upon your trunk. Do you remember Olivia—Olivia of Sumner Place? Oh, Oak of Sumner Chase, have you ever seen a daintier maiden than Olivia in all the years of your life?"

"I remember Olivia. Once I saw her every day," says the Oak. "There are no roses like the English roses, and I have seen many roses blooming in many summers while I stood silent here, knee-deep in tall fern, my deep roots spreading out underground as my great branches do high overhead in the blue air where the swallows

are playing. They call this green part of the Squire's park the Chase, and the great house, that I can only see with the very topmost twigs of my topmost boughs, that is Sumner Place. Many pretty children have I seen grow up into strong men and beautiful women; over them all have I spread out my great green arms in blessing. Far away, and long ago, in the days before bluff and rough and tough King Harry the Eighth broke into the monasteries and cast out the monks who prayed there, and made England a Protestant country—far away and long ago in the days when this King Harry's daughter sat on the throne and ruled England, and defied Spain, and made her name of Elizabeth a music and a glory to English ears—in the times when there was no king in England, only a Protector, a strong man, loved of strong men, whose name was Oliver Cromwell—in the times when ladies wore hoops, and patched their cheeks and chins—I saw pretty maids and boys grow up, and change and be children no longer; and in all these years I never saw a prettier creature than the girl of to-day, whose name is called Olivia Sumner. The ladies in ruffs and the ladies in curls, the ladies in powder and patches, have all died and passed away, and the trees know them no longer, but Olivia is warm and alive and lovely and loving to-day."

Here the Oak stopped talking a minute, and fluttered in every leaf on every twig, because a friend was coming—the Wind, whom every tree loves and looks for day in and day out. Then he went on:—

"I wear round me five hundred rings in my wood, and that means five hundred years, and never since I was tall enough to cast a shadow have I seen pass by me any child prettier than Olivia, when she tumbled, a crowing baby, on the grass among the tiny oak trees that sprout from my dropped acorns, and wither away and come to nothing, killed by the shadow that their own father casts. The Fairies are a delicate and pretty people, and they are busy and diligent about their work of keeping the grass soft and fresh and green, but they are far too slight and thin, and they are made of cloud and moonshine, while Olivia is a sound, sweet human being, made of flesh and blood. When did I see Olivia last? Why, yesterday. There was a fair in

the town, and her father left his armchair and his newspaper to put on his boots, and take down his whip from the wall and ride his hunter into the thick of it. Her mother had the grey ponies harnessed to her little carriage, and drove away to the fair an hour after the Squire had gone; but my pretty Olivia stayed at home. She went on the roof, which is flat, and has a low parapet all round, and she looked up and down the road, but there was nothing there she cared to see, and nothing she cared to do.

"There was a new book on her bookshelf, but she did not want to read it, although not half of its pages had been cut; she did not want to open the new piano, which stood in a corner of her own room; she did not know how to please herself or how to keep herself busy. She was very unlike a tree in this, for a tree always knows what to do, whether in work or play—at work for itself or at play with the wind. It has to send its roots out in search of water, and strike them deep down into the right kind of soil that will keep it alive and healthy in every tiniest twig and every fold of bark; it has to drink dew, and take baths of sunshine and moonshine, and crook its arms safely round the nests birds trust to it; it has to suck in from the air the secret stuff that makes its leaves green; it has to change colour in autumn, and let its leaves drop to make the earth rich at its

feet; it has to bear the pain of beetles burrowing under its brown bark; and when the time is ripe for it to die, the tree must bear to fall, and be carted away, and cut up, perhaps, into firewood, and be forgotten.

"But about Olivia. She ran out at last into the park singing, her voice flying before her, livelier than a lark, and the wind ran after her, and chased her, and caught her, and tumbled all her glossy hair. Away she ran, as light as the wind that chased her, and the daisies that she trod on were not bruised by her gay feet, but rose up again, when she had passed, to look at her. She ran through the Chase till she found me, the biggest oak of all, and she danced and frolicked round me like a fairy, and sang me a song that you, her playfellow Walter, had written about my great trunk and spreading branches—the very trunk upon whose bark you, Walter, had carved with a pocket-knife her name, OLIVIA, in a ring.

"She sang to me, I say, and then she danced for me, and, last of all, she tried to put her arms round me, but I am so big a tree that they would not meet, and for once in my life I wished myself as slim as the young beech tree here beside me, that she might have been able to make her hands meet round my waist."

"I don't wonder," said I. "But while she frolicked and danced like this, had my pretty Olive only the wind for her playfellow? What was her brother Albert doing to let her be all alone?"

"Oh, he had gone out riding with his father," said the Oak. "I looked at him with pleasure, as he rode by me on his grey hack—he is as like Olivia as an oxlip is like a cowslip."

"I like the cowslip best," said I.

"You are always interrupting," complained the Oak. "Perhaps I like the cowslip best myself. It is the fairies' flower, anyway, isn't it?—or so your Shakespeare says. Was it not a fairy's fancy to hang a jewel in a cowslip's ear? But I was talking about a living human flower—Olivia."

"True, dear old friend. Go on talking about Olivia."

"She wandered round me, and looked for and found the place where her name was cut; and when she found the name she laughed and kissed it, for she and you will be married some day, and so she loves everything your hands have touched." The Oak sighed gustily here. "At last she got tired of frolicking

and dancing round me, and she laid down in my shadow and slept, making her arm a pillow for her head. I was very careful of her in her sleep. All my leaves whispered softly to her, speaking as gently as if they, too, were asleep, and talking in their sleep. Sometimes I let a sunbeam run through my leaves to look down at her and play upon her eyelids, or dance round her mouth like a golden butterfly, or gleam upon the necklace she wears, or go sliding down her as she lay, running from her head to her ankle. Then I made all my boughs a deep shadow for her, that her sleep might be all the deeper and the sweeter; and I dropped down dew upon her golden hair, and I dropped, too, one of my acorns, the finest on the tree, right upon her breast. But this made Olivia wake, and she was angry with my poor little acorn, and she took him out of his cup and threw him away. And I was sorry to see her despise him and throw him down in the dew, because I gave him to her for love, and he was the finest acorn on my tree. He lies beside you in the grass, Walter. Pick him up and kiss him for me. Kiss him three times, and then set him down again in the grass, and by-and-by he shall strike root there, and grow into the finest oak tree under English skies. For the promise of an oak lies in every acorn."

"I have kissed it three times, dear old Oak, and if it grows as high as my hope for it, it will be tall indeed. But you I have even a kindlier wish for. Whatever kingdoms overturn, or pass, like the shoe in a child's game, from hand to hand, your leaf shall never fail, nor your acorn be lost to the land. Saw shall not hurt you, or woodman's axe be lifted against you, O you fairest of all trees from here to Lizard Point.

"And this I promise you, that when Olive and I are married, she shall wear in her wedding wreath oak leaves and acorns that my own hand shall gather from your branches, staunch friend and stately Oak."

SIR GERAINT was one of the strongest and boldest of all the Knights of Arthur's great Round Table. A man of Devon he was, broad-shouldered and fair, with long arms and strong hands, and he could throw a spear as well as he could sit a horse, and pull an oar as well as he could throw a spear; and dearly he loved hawk and horse and hound, but dearlier than all things he loved his wife Enid—Enid of the Faded Dress. Here is the story of Enid and her Dress.

The daffodils were over and it was Whitsuntide, and King Arthur was holding his Court at Caerleon-on-Usk. As he sat in hall one day with all his knights around him, there came before him a forester from the great Forest of Dean. The man knelt before the King.

"News, O King."

"What news, my forester? Are there outlaws in Dean driving the King's deer?"

"No, my lord. There is a strange hart ranging the woods, a beautiful beast, standing taller than any creature of the herd. Milk

white he is; and when I saw him this morning out in the wet woods I thought that here were horns and hide worthy a King's hunting."

"You have done well, my forester; we will hunt the white hart to-morrow," Arthur said; and then broke off in his speaking, because Queen Guinevere was looking at him eagerly. "What would the Queen have of me?"

"A boon, my lord," cried Guinevere. "Let me ride after the white hart with you. Time was when I was as eager in the chase as you or any of your knights."

"True," said the King, "but that time is over. Still, my Queen, you shall ride a-hunting with us to-morrow, if you will." But when the morning came, all the hunting-party rose and rode off early while still the drops of dew were wet on clod and grass, and the Queen was too fast asleep in her golden bed to hear the horns they blew to waken her. So they rode off without her, and when she awoke it was broad

morning. So, laughing at her own laziness, she dressed herself in a gown of green and gold, and rode out with only one lady of the Court with her. They forded the Usk river, and came to a little wood. Here they stayed their horses on a piece of rising ground that overlooked both wood and water—the Usk on one side, and the Forest of Dean on the other.

"We shall hear the hounds from this place," said the Queen.

"I hear something now," said the lady-in-waiting. "But it is not the hunt; I hear the hoofs of only one horse."

"It is a knight of the Round Table," said the Queen, as a gay figure came splashing through the shallow water of the ford, and rode up to the knoll where they waited. It was Sir Geraint.

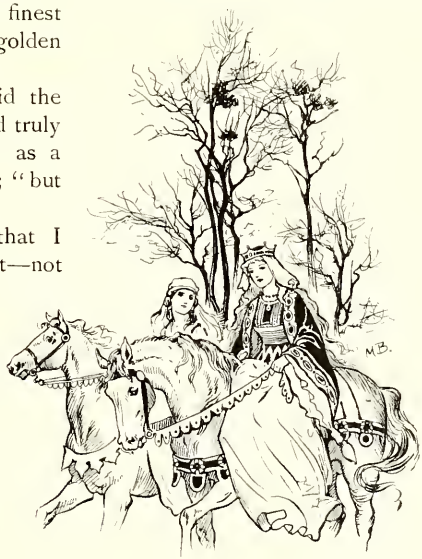
He was not dressed for the chase, and he carried no weapons except the sword at his side, but he looked as bright as a dragon-fly, for he was in his richest riding-dress, and a purple scarf was over his shoulder—a scarf of the finest purple silk, with a little golden apple at each end.

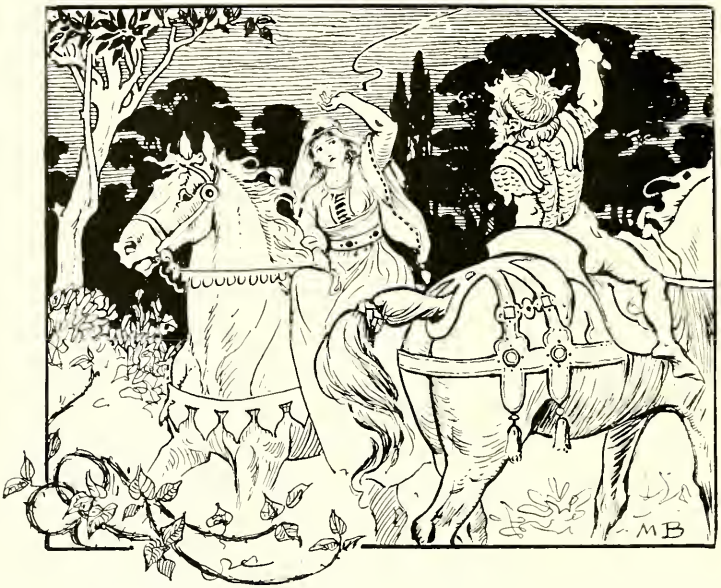
"Well met, Prince," said the Queen (Geraint was really and truly a Prince of Devon, as well as a Knight of the Round Table); "but you are later than we."

"So late, my Queen, that I only come to see the hunt—not join it."

"We shall see it from here, surely," she said, "for the hounds often break cover at the foot of this little knoll. Hush, do you hear anything?"

"More horses are coming," said the lady-in-waiting, "but it is not the hunt."





It was a knight, a lady, and a dwarf, who now rode slowly by, the dwarf last. The knight's vizor was up, and Guinevere looked at his haughty young face, and wondered who he was.

"Go and ask his name," she said, and her lady-in-waiting rode after the little old dwarf, and asked him his master's name.

"I shall not tell you," said he, snappishly.

"Well, I will ask him himself," said the lady.

"That you shall not. You are not to ride a step nearer to him," snarled the dwarf; and as she tried to pass him and ride on towards the knight, he cut her across the hand with his whip.

She went back, indignant, to the Queen, and Geraint, in a passion, rode after the dwarf and asked him the same question, got the same answer, tried to push by the cross little wretch, and got the whip slashed across his face for his pains.

Then he went back to the Queen in a white heat of anger. "I will ride after master and man, and get the master's name sooner or later; and he shall fight me when I have somewhere got me arms for love or money, and I will so avenge the insult done to you in the person of this your lady, noble Queen; and having punished him, if I am alive, in three days I shall return."

"Do so," said the Queen. "Be lucky in this quest of yours, Prince Geraint, and having punished the hard word and the hard blow, bring home with you something sweeter than justice. Perhaps, in humbling this proud knight and his insolent servant, you will find a sweet wife for yourself. If you do, bring her to me; and be she beggar-girl or King's daughter, I will give her a wedding dress that shall shine like the sun."

Geraint rode away, angry at missing the hunt, and angrier at the rudeness of the dwarf. Up hill and down dale he rode, seeing the three he followed riding far ahead. At last he saw the three figures climb a hill-ridge, and stand out clearly against the sky for a minute; then they disappeared. When Geraint crossed the ridge a few minutes later he did not see the three at first. Just below him lay a long valley, and a little town lay in the lap of it. The town had one long street, and there was a ruined castle further on, just beyond a bridge over a ravine where once there had run a hill-torrent that now was dry. Nearer him rose a new castle, new from the mason's hand, and as he looked at it the three he followed were riding in at the gates of it. "So I have run them down," thought Geraint, as he rode down into the valley and entered the town. It was very busy and very noisy, and the one long street of it hummed like a hive.

"What's to do here?" Geraint asked of a boy who was whistling as he scoured and cleaned his master's armour.

"The Sparrow-hawk," said the lad. Geraint tried again. This time he spoke to an old man who was hobbling along the street, bent almost in two under the weight of a sack of corn.

"Oh!" said the old man with a cough, "it means the Sparrow-hawk." Geraint next called to an armourer, who sat in his stall hard at work riveting a helmet.

"What's doing here, and what makes all this noise?"

The man never lifted his eyes from his work as he answered, "Friend, he who works for the Sparrow-hawk has no time for talking."

Geraint lost his temper at this, and burst out, "May all your Sparrow-hawk's feathers drop out, and wrens peck at him! I want to know where I can get lodgings for the night, and a suit of armour?"

The armourer turned round, and seeing the gay figure in purple silks, changed his tone.

"Pardon, Sir Knight! There is to be a tournament here to-morrow, and I have hardly time for half the work I have to do. For armour, I know not where you will go—all the armour we have in the town will be in use to-morrow. Lodgings? I hardly know, unless at Earl Yniol's yonder, over the bridge. Try there," and he fell again to his work.

Geraint rode across the bridge that spanned the dry river-channel, and came to the door of the ruined castle. There sat a grey-haired man in a dress that had once been splendid. This was Earl Yniol.

"Where do you go, fair sir?" he asked; and Geraint answered, smiling, "Truly, I come to beg a lodging for the night from you."

"Come in," said Yniol. "My castle that was rich and strong is now plundered and poor, but its door still stands open."

"Thanks," Geraint said; "I shall be heartily glad of lodging and food, so long"—and he laughed—"as you do not serve me sparrow-hawks for supper."

The Earl sighed and smiled, "I have more cause to dislike sparrow-hawks than you. Come in, come in."

Geraint rode into the castle court. It was all in ruins, like the castle itself. Thistles grew there, and in the archways of the towers ferns sprang up, and great stones had fallen out of the walls, and wild flowers grew all over the fallen masonry. Part of a tower was open to the day, and Geraint saw a piece of turret-stair winding through a great tangle of ivy-leaves and ivy-stems.

While he waited for some one to come and take his horse from him, he heard a girl's voice singing inside the castle. It was Enid, Yniol's daughter. In a voice clear as a nightingale's, she sang a song of good and bad fortune :—

"Turn, Fortune, turn thy wheel and lower the proud;
Turn thy wild wheel thro' sunshine, storm, and cloud;
Thy wheel and thee we neither love nor hate.

Turn, Fortune, turn thy wheel with smile or frown;
With that wild wheel we go not up or down;
Our hoard is little, but our hearts are great.

Smile, and we smile, the lords of many lands;
Frown, and we smile, the lords of our own hands;
For man is man and master of his fate.

Turn, turn thy wheel above the staring crowd;
Thy wheel and thou are shadows in the cloud;
Thy wheel and thee we neither love nor hate."

"You have heard the bird's song," Yniol said, "now come into the nest," and Geraint followed him over the doorsill, strewn with stones newly-fallen, into a great hall whose rafters were hung with

cobwebs. Here there was the Earl's wife, an old lady in a gown of faded brocade, and beside her, red-and-white as a newly budded York-and-Lancaster rose, was her daughter Enid, wearing a dress of silk as faded as her own.

Yniol was so poor that he had no squire, so Enid it was who took Geraint's steed to stall—Enid who cooked and served the dinner and poured the wine. She went into the town and brought spice cakes and white bread back with her in a basket; and when her father and his visitor had dined, Enid cleared away the remnants of the meal, and made sweet order out of disorder. Geraint watched her stepping to and fro about the hall, and suddenly he said to her father:

"Tell me what is this Sparrow-hawk? Can he by any chance be the knight whose dwarf this morning struck the Queen's bower-maiden? If so, do not tell me his name, for I have sworn, as surely as my name is Geraint of Devon, to have this caitiff knight's name from his own lips when I have fought with him and conquered him.

I followed this knight to a new castle outside this town, and came into the town asking for arms, but all your townsmen here are hawk-mad, and I could get no arms anywhere."

"So you are Geraint of Devon? Well, we know you by your renown, Enid and I," said the Earl. "As for the Sparrow-hawk, he is my own nephew, and he is like enough to be the knight whose dwarf struck your Queen's waiting-woman—like master, like man. I will not tell you his name, as you would fain have it from himself; but this I will tell you, that he desired to marry Enid, and being denied her, he raised my own town against me in the night, bribed my nearest friends and kinsmen, sacked my house and sent me here, a kind of prisoner, to this ruined castle, where he would kill me if he thought me worth the killing."

"Give me arms," exclaimed Geraint, "and I will bring his crest down to the dust."

"Arms I have," answered Yniol, "but old and rusty like myself, Prince Geraint. But no one can fight in this tournament except in the name of a lady, for the prize of the tournament is a golden sparrow-hawk, and the good knight who overcomes my nephew and carries off the hawk shall have the lady of his choice acclaimed as fairest of the fair. Have you a wife to fight for, Prince Geraint?"

"No," Geraint said; "but give me Enid for my wife, and I will lay lance in rest in her name, and if I live to bear away the prize she shall be Princess of Devon."

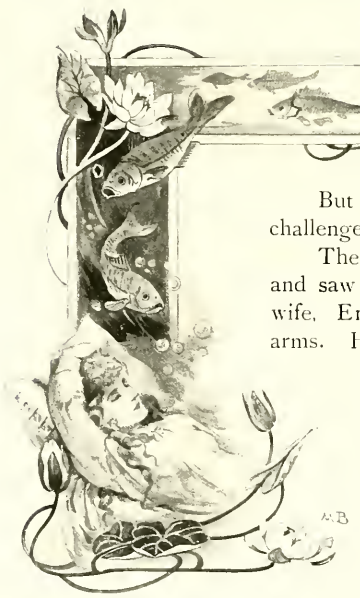
Then Yniol's heart danced in his bosom, because he saw that better days were coming for them all; and he called his wife to him, and took her hand in his.

"A girl is a tender flower, and

best handled by her mother," he said. "Go to Enid before she sleeps, and tell her what the Prince says."

So Enid's mother went, smiling, to Enid's room, and found her making ready for her bed. She gave her her father's message, and Enid listened to it silently, and silently kissed her mother good-night. Then she lay down on her little bed, and thought and wondered all night long. She and her mother rose with the lark next morning, and hand in hand they went down to the meadow where the tournament was held, and waited there for Yniol and Geraint.

They came soon, and Geraint was wearing the rusty armour Earl Yniol had lent him. Very soon after their coming the meadow was crowded—all but the clear space for the knights to tilt in. A trumpet was blown, and Yniol's nephew turned to the lady who stood beside him and said:



"Come forward and take the prize again as fairest of the fair. Two years running have I won it for you, and this year no one challenges me."

But Geraint shouted: "There *is* a challenger! Here stands a lovelier lady!"

The Sparrow-hawk knight turned and saw the four—his uncle and his uncle's wife, Enid, and a tall stranger in rusty arms. His face flamed with anger as he saw them.

"Do battle for the hawk, then!" he cried; and Geraint and he clashed together, breaking each three spears, then sprang off their horses and attacked each other with their swords. They struck great blows at one another, but neither had the advantage,

for they were equally matched in strength and sword-play. At last Yniol cried out:

"Remember that great insult done Queen Guinevere!" and that cry put fresh strength into Geraint's arm, so that he brought his sword down on his opponent's head with a terrific crash. The Sparrow-hawk's helmet was cracked through and through, and he fell at Geraint's feet. Geraint set his foot on the fallen man's neck.

"What is your name?" he said.

And the Sparrow-hawk groaned out:

"Edyrn, son of Nudd. I am ashamed to tell my name to you, because my pride is broken down in me."

"Well, Edyrn, son of Nudd, I have two commands to lay upon you. You and your damsel and your dwarf shall ride to Caerleon, and ask pardon there of the Queen for the blow struck at her bower-lady. Next, you shall give back the earldom to the rightful lord, Earl Yniol here. Now, will you do these two things, or will you die here at my hands? Choose!"

And Edyrn answered, groaning:

"You have conquered me, and I will do your will. I am broken down, for Enid saw me conquered, and brought low."

He kept his word, and rode to Caerleon, and there asked pardon of the Queen. And when Guinevere forgave him his heart softened yet more, and he changed his manner of life altogether, and became gentle as well as brave, and at last he died in a great battle, fighting for King Arthur.

Meanwhile the golden sparrow-hawk was Enid's prize, and Yniol was Earl again in his own town, and Enid had promised in three days to ride with Geraint to Caerleon-upon-Usk, there to be married to him.

And on the eve of the third day Enid lay long awake, and at dawn, when birds began to flutter in their nests among the ivy at her window, Enid was waking still.

She was afraid of the solemn splendour of the Court, and she gazed at the old silk dress she had worn the night before, and found it far too mean for the wife of so great a knight as Geraint. She

remembered and longed for a dress flowered with gold that her mother had given her as a birthday gift the night before Edyrn had raised their town against them and driven them out from their own home to this ruined castle, where Geraint had found her. In the confusion the dress had been left behind.

"There was a pond there in my old home," she said to herself, "and there were golden carp in it that I used to love to watch, and there was one poor fish there all blurred and pale and lustreless. I, in my faded, shabby dress at Court, shall be like that pale fish among the golden carp." And being half-asleep she passed into a dream of being a fish in the King's fishpond—a poor, pale, ugly fish that lay in a deep pool, and saw lovely ladies walking in the garden; and royal children playing round her pool, and hoped they would not notice her. But then the Queen came by, and the children ran to her saying, "There is an ugly fish among the golden carp in the pool. Bid the gardeners take it up out of the water and throw it somewhere away to die." And Enid felt a hand grasp her, and woke, frightened, with her mother's voice in her ears.

And her mother had a dress sprigged and flowered with gold flung over her arm—the very dress Enid had been regretting.

"Yesterday the townsfolk came bringing our scattered goods and chattels back to us," said her mother, "and this was brought to me untouched. No one has worn it, and its colours are as fresh and fair as the morning. Rise up and put it on, that you may do honour to the Prince you are going to marry."

So Enid put on the beautiful dress, in which she looked as lovely as a white star sparkling through a cloud. But while she was dressing there came to her a message from Geraint begging that she would wear her old dress to ride with him to Caerleon. Enid was grieved, and her mother angry, but neither said a word. Silently Enid took off the beautiful dress and put on the shabby one, and silently went down to Geraint, who was waiting for her in the hall.

Then Geraint's heart danced within him for joy. Seeing that Enid's mother wore a cloudy face, he took her hands in his and said, "Do not be angry with me, good mother. I that made this hard

request without giving a reason, had yet two good reasons in my mind. And the first reason bears the name of Guinevere, your Queen and mine. She bade me bring my bride to her, wherever I found her, in castle or cottage, and she would give my bride her wedding dress. And this I promised she should do. And the next reason was this. I was not quite sure of Enid's mind and heart towards me. She is so dear and meek a child that she might be marrying me out of pure obedience to you. So I thought I would try if she loved me by asking some hard thing of her without giving a reason for it. I should thus see if her love for me was strong enough to stand such a test. It has stood the test, and I am content. Enid shall wear the rich dress you gave her when next she visits you as my wife, the Lady of Devon."

The Earl's wife smiled and sighed and kissed her daughter good-bye; and then Yniol and Geraint and Enid all rode away together on their way to Caerleon-upon-Usk.

There Guinevere gave her a royal welcome and a splendid

wedding, and Enid's wedding dress was as pure as a wreath of snow new fallen and as shining as the sun. But she kept the old and shabby dress, put carefully away in a carved coffer that held her greatest treasures

THE LORD OF BURLEIGH

YOU have heard of "Sally in our Alley," haven't you? Perhaps you have even sung the song, verse by verse, and wondered what she was like, this pretty city maid, whose lover wrote so tenderly of her—

"There's none so sweet as Sally."

But have you ever heard of Countess Sally? No? Well, have patience a little, and I will tell you her story.

Sally's father lived in a sweet, green countryside, all full of little hills and green dips, and combes and valleys clothed with emerald grass, and patched, in their season, with white and pink stretches of windflowers, sheets of blue hyacinths, hosts of yellow ox-eyes (in some parts of England they call these thunder-daisies—don't you wonder why?), and great companies of meadow-saffron, which comes in autumn and plays at being a crocus, while it is not really a crocus at all.

Sally was like all these flowers. The blue of the hyacinth was in her eyes, and her cheeks were of the windflowers' colour (you will

see what *that* is in sheltered copses any early day in March). Her hair was as yellow as the heart of a daisy, and the little veins on her wrists and forehead were as delicate and lovely as the veins in the petals of the meadow-saffron.

Sally was eighteen, and many a lad in the village had wanted to marry her ere this, but she would have none of them. Tom the miller might grow as pale as his own flour ; Jack and Walter might go about the village looking yellow with envy and green with jealousy; Tony the shepherd might give all his time to his ewes and lambs, for Sally had not a word to say to any of them. Sally's smiles and shy glances and soft words were all for the young painter who was staying at the Rose and Crown inn.

He came to the village one wild morning in May, which for sudden storms of rain and fits of sunshine was more like a day in April, and before June was in full flower Sally had promised to be his wife as soon as he chose. He chose that it should be very soon, as you may guess, and before July was a week old he and Sally walked into the village church together, and were quietly married before any of the villagers had come home from the fields.

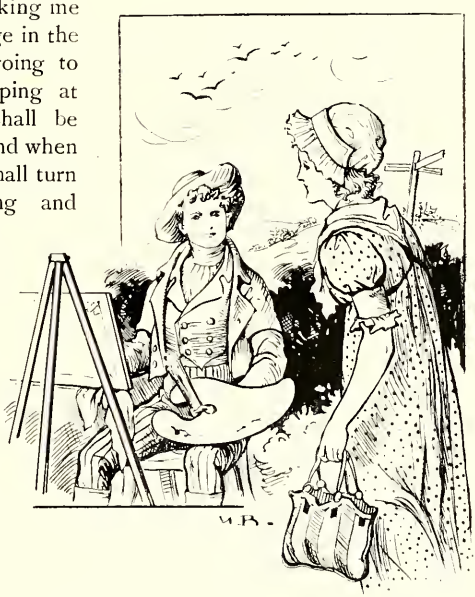
A few school-children saw them married, and that was all. One of them remembered to the end of her days how pretty Sally had looked in her dress of yellow sprigged muslin, and a gathered hood and cape of green silk. Her face smiled down at the gazing children like a pink rose smiling out of its leaves.

"Are you going away for good and all?" one of them asked.

"I am going away," said Sally, smiling up at her tall husband, "but I shall come back some day. Robin here has promised to bring me."

"Are you going away to be a lady?" ventured a little girl.

Sally laughed and kissed her. "What put such a thought as that in your silly, pretty little head?" she said. "No, I am a poor man's daughter, and now I am a poor man's wife. Robin is taking me to his home, a little cottage in the next shire. We are going to walk all the way, sleeping at wayside inns, for we shall be three days on the road; and when we get to the cottage I shall turn to brewing and baking and sewing, and be one of the busiest wives in England, and as happy as the day is long." Then she put her hand through her husband's arm, and they went away together out of the village, which never saw Countess Sally any more.



"But why was she called Countess

Sally? You have been calling her plain Sally all this time," you interrupt.

Patience only a very little longer, dear little listeners, for we are coming to the Countess part of the story this very minute. Sally and her husband went off together arm-in-arm, and when they had walked three or four miles they sat down to rest near the lodge-gate of some great country house, whose master and mistress were in town. Sally saw through the gates the colour of some splendid scarlet lilies, and, "Oh, I wish I could see them nearer!" she sighed. "Would they grow in our cottage garden, Robin, do you think?" Robin walked into the lodge and said a few words to the lodge-keeper, and in a very few minutes he and Sally were on the right instead of the wrong side of the gates, and walking happily together among the flower-beds.

Sally praised the tall blue larkspurs and the great white Canterbury bells, and wondered if they would grow in the garden of her new home. Robin laughed and kissed her, vowing that if they would not it would not matter.

"You have larkspur-blue in your

eyes, and your forehead is as white as the whitest Canterbury bell," he said; "and if I have a flower by my fireside, I care not if I have few in my garden."

Then on they went again. That was the first, but it was not the last splendid garden they visited. A word at the lodge was always enough. Robin and his wife walked under great trees, on grass that was like a carpet of green velvet, and they feasted their eyes on gorgeous flowers and curious plants. At last, at the end of the third day, when Sally's little feet were growing tired after the many miles they had covered, they came to the stateliest gateway that they had yet seen. Lions carved out of grey stone, and weather-beaten with many years' rain, ramped on each side of it, and the great gates of it stood wide open.

"It will soon be sunset, Robin," murmured Sally. "Must we see this place too?"

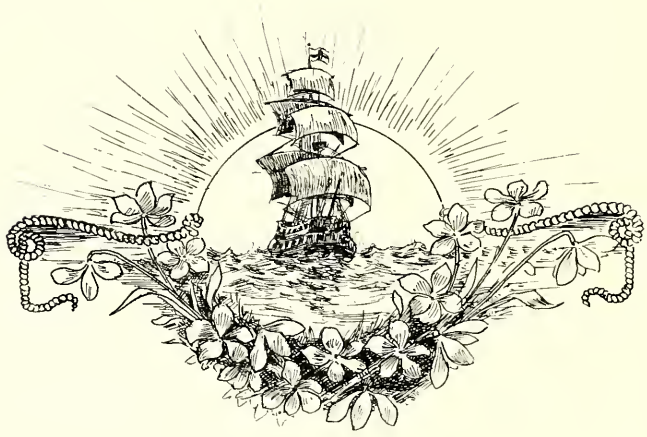
"Only this one place more, little wife, and then we shall be at home."

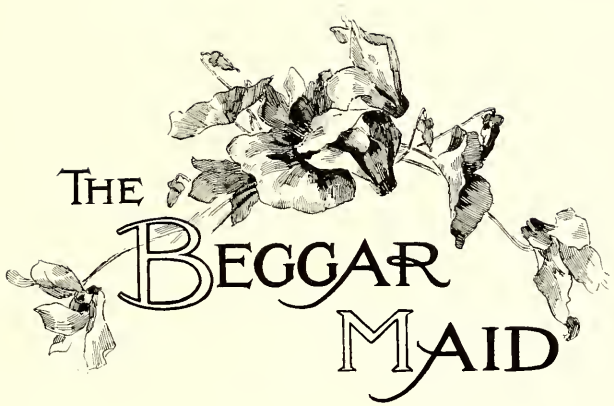
So Sally took heart of grace, and they went in up the long drive, across broad green lawns, up some wide steps, and then passed in through the doorway of a huge grey stone house. There were lights in all the windows, though it was not yet dark, and the hall was a bower of blossoming roses and palms, with great green fans of leaves. Servants met them in the hall and followed them up the shining oak staircase, and went before them with lighted candles in branched silver candlesticks. And Robin, with a glowing face, hurried her from room to room, till at last he stopped in the brightest, floweriest room of all, and took his wondering bride into his arms.

"All of this is yours and mine," he said. "There is no cottage for you, Sally, and no need for you to bake and brew, for I am Robert Cecil, Lord of Burleigh, and you are the Countess Sally."

Countess Sally turned as white as a white rose, and then her face flushed rosily again. The dream-cottage had gone out of her heart, leaving an ache behind, but she never told her husband this. Like a good wife, she did her best to please him and set his heart at ease; and she never let him see that the duties of her rank weighed heavily upon

her, and that she was often perplexed and distressed and wearied with the burden of an honour that she was not born to bear. But she grew to look and walk and speak like a noble lady, and she made the Lord of Burleigh a meek and very loving wife, and to the three children that God sent them she was the tenderest of mothers. But husband and children were not able to keep Countess Sally long. When the third little child was still a baby she died. Sorely Robert Cecil wept for her, and he buried her in the dress of sprigged yellow muslin that she had worn on her wedding day, when she had believed him to be a poor man, marrying a poor girl, and they had set out together hand-in-hand to seek that dream-cottage that was never to be their home.





KING COPHETUA was tired of everything. His palace was one of the wonders of the world—a dream of beauty caught and caged in stone. Towers and walls of it, gateways and roofs of it, all were in carven white stone, beautiful to see. Marble figures of kings and angels stood on the battlements of the towers, and the staffs from whose tops floated King Cophetua's banner—a great square of purple silk, worked with golden tulips—had the wood of which they were made overlaid with gold leaf. Up and down the wide stone steps of the palace flowed a rainbow river of men and women coming and going—silk mantles and velvet gowns whispered over floors of cedar-wood inlaid with ivory and mother-of-pearl ; and in the courtyard two or three boy minstrels sang against the singing of a great fountain, on whose top danced a golden ball. Inside the palace was more music. In a room coloured like the heart of a damask rose, red floor, red walls, red ceiling and pillars of rose marble, the Queen-Mother sat sewing the first letter of the King's name in silver thread on a square of crimson silk. Around her sat her waiting-women, seven in number. The Queen-Mother's robe was of

dead-white velvet, and her sleeves were of orange silk, and of orange silk was the little cap she wore on her white hair. All her women had red hair; they were all beautiful and they were all dressed in green. So the room and the white Queen and her waiting-women were like a rose and a lily and a lily's green leaves. Every one of the green-clad ladies-in-waiting was at work like the Queen. Each sewed a letter upon a square of silk, and each a different letter. The Lady Orpha worked a capital O; the Lady Phœbe sewed a P; the Lady Helen had finished embroidering an H; the Lady Enna was just beginning E; the Lady Tellus was working at T: the Lady Una's auburn head was bent over her U; and the Lady Agatha had just folded up and put away her silken square bearing an A in glittering silver thread. And the Queen's huge C—the largest letter on the largest square of silk—was half done.

Here among the women there was also music. There was a harp-player beside Queen Cecilia, and a lute lay at the feet of Lady Una, and a page sat beside Lady Phœbe with a flute across his knees.

And far away in another part of the palace the voice of a mighty organ rose and fell. This organ stood in the King's own favourite chamber—a place specially set apart for him, where nobody—not even the Queen-Mother—dared to come without the King's invitation or the King's leave. I said, "even the Queen-Mother;" but she was not at all a likely visitor to her son, for she came into his presence very seldom, and he came into hers still seldomer, so that sometimes a week passed and the Queen and King had not seen one another.

When old King Cophetua had died the Queen had tried to make herself as necessary to young King Cophetua as his left hand; but her trying had been of no good. The King had loved his father, but he had not loved his father's second wife, though she had always been a kind stepmother to him; and when he was lord of the kingdom and the palace, he chose to see very little of the Queen-Mother and the ladies of the Court. His stepmother's red-haired waiting-women were all afraid of him, and he disliked them; his young step-brother Felix was afraid of him (though Cophetua was fond of him); and the King was very lonely in his greatness and splendour, though he would never have confessed to it.

This afternoon, when my tale begins and ends, he was feeling lonelier than ever. It was an afternoon in May; the sky was blue and dappled with faint pink clouds, and in mid-air the swallows were darting and wheeling and crying, every minute dropping nearer and nearer to their nests under the palace eaves. Cophetua sat in his favourite room just inside a window opening upon a little balcony. This was hung all round with a tall vine that mixed its leaves and branches with some other creepers whose flowers hung down in bunches like pale-blue grapes.

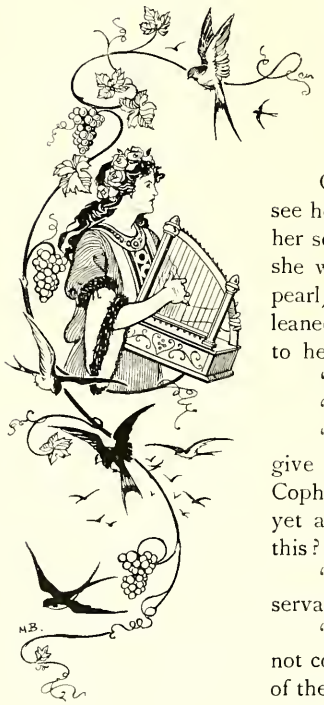
Another voice joined in with the song of the fountain, and it was so sweet a voice that the King came out on the balcony to hear it better. The voice was that of a beggar-girl. She stood in the court-yard just under the King's window, a slender creature dressed in rags,

with black hair showering down over her shoulders. She sang of spring in the world and spring in the heart—and Cophetua's eyes grew soft as he listened :—

"Be young to-day with me
Great wonders shalt thou see ;
Where seed-time long ago
Set but a soulless seed—
Thou'lt see a rose-root grow
Or coral-weed.

"The summer follows me—
But thou must craftily
Work, lest the rose grow pale
And faithful nightingale
His love for her forget—
Seeing her sun is set.

"The spring is thine and mine,
And here are flowers in sign
That there's enough of spring
For beggar and for King——"



Cophetua leaned over the balcony to see her better. She raised her head, stopped her song, and looked up at him. Very lovely she was, with a face as pale and pure as a pearl, in clouds of dark hair. Cophetua leaned lower over the balcony and called to her,

"What dost thou want for thy song ? "

"Bread. I am hungry, King."

"I will feed thee from gold plate, and give thee to drink from cups of silver," Cophetua said, "if thou wilt sing again, and yet again, and only for me. Wilt thou do this ? "

"My lord has only to command his servant."

"Nay, but thy lord beseeches, and does not command. What is thy name, O woman of the voice of gold ? "

"Penelophon."

"I sit lonely upon my throne, Penelophon. Wilt thou marry me and be my Queen, and heal the King of his loneliness?"

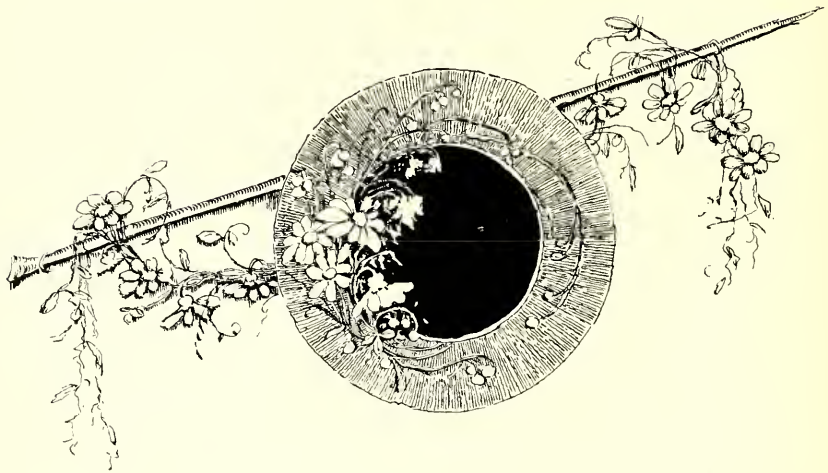
"I will," said the beggar-girl. She waited in the courtyard till the King came down to her; and then—the one splendid in gold and scarlet, the other lovely in her ragged dress—they went through room after room of the palace, till at last they reached the rose-room, where the Queen-Mother sat at her embroidery.

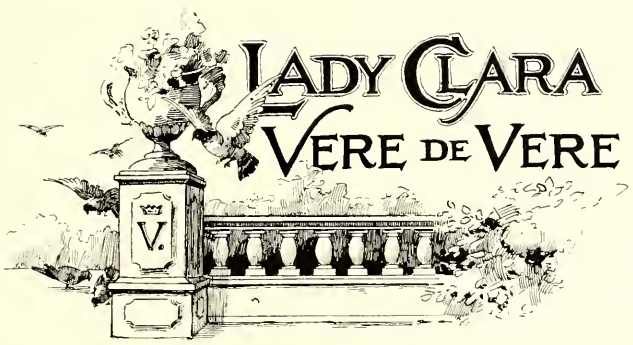
"Whom have we here?" she said, letting her silk and silver drop as the King and the beggar-girl entered.

"I have brought the Queen to the Queen-Mother," Cophetua said.

The Queen-Mother was a wise woman. She looked at Penelophon's beautiful face, and then she looked at her step-son and saw how the lost look and the discontent had gone from his face. She put out both her hands and drew Penelophon near.

"I am the old moon," she said, "and thou art the young dawn; and though thy rising means my setting, I give thee a hearty greeting. The Queen is welcome to the Queen-Mother."





LADY CLARA VERE DE VERE came down to the country in June "sick and tired," she said, "of routs and dances, of powder and paint and patches"; she was determined to lead a sweet and simple and homely life in the sweet green Weald of Kent, where she was born, and where her father's great grey house stood at the end of a long avenue of splendid oaks and chestnut trees. "I mean to visit the housekeeper in her room," said Lady Clara, "and learn all manner of useful things from her—how to make cowslip wine, and how to darn house-linen beautifully. And I will learn how to doctor cuts and burns, and I will preserve apricots, and cure hams, and be as clever a woman as my mother, who died so long ago."

The housekeeper was more than willing to teach Lady Clara all she knew, but there were difficulties in the way. To begin with, cowslip-time was over, and apricots were not yet ready for preserving. Then all the linen in the linen-chests was in perfectly good repair, and the maids could hardly be expected to cut holes in good sheets and fine table-cloths in order that their young mistress might mend

them. Then it fell out that nobody hurt themselves. Sharp as the knives were, no maid so much as cut her finger when cutting thin bread and butter; dark as the passages were, and slippery as the oak stairs were kept with bees' wax and much rubbing, nobody twisted an ankle or missed a step, and there was no household surgery for Lady Clara to do.

The long blue days of summer hung heavily upon her hands, and the idea of taking lessons in housewifery no longer seemed to promise any use or pleasure.

She went out riding all over her father's park, and startled the deer

that had not seen anyone but the keepers in all their wild lives; but she could not outride the little demon of Selfishness that was so often in her company. She went into marshy places to look for marigolds, but the wet black mud that clung to her skirts and clogged her feet made her cross, and the sun gave her a headache, and she came back to the Hall, and asked drearily of the peacock on the terrace and the pictures on the walls, "What am I to do?"

The peacock opened his beak and screamed; not that he cared a jot for Lady Clara and her moods, or whether she was pleased or no, but rain was coming, and so, peacock like, he was bound to scream.

"You ugly bird," said Lady Clara, crossly, "I wish the gardener would wring your neck." But the peacock knew that he was safe from any gardener's hands, for Lady Clara's mother had loved him, and so he only spread his splendid tail full of eyes and walked to and fro on his big and ugly feet, courting the admiration of his two hens.

Lady Clara stamped her little foot and went on into the house to ask the pictures what she should do with herself.

"I can't hunt," she said angrily to her grandfather's portrait, as she stood in front of it, looking up at him with sulky, lovely eyes. "The season's over . . . and there isn't a soul to speak to except the Vicar, and he is always digging among old books in his musty, dusty library.

What shall I do with myself till the month is up and my father comes down, and the house is filled up with visitors?"

Her grandfather's portrait said nothing, and Lady Clara turned away pouting.

"I will get a kitten or a puppy to play with," she said to herself as she ran out into the garden again to see if the flowers would help to amuse her. "I am duller than a fountain whose pipe is choked up, and this place is like a stagnant pond. All the greenness here is only slime and duckweed." And she looked round defiantly at the lilies and roses and torchflowers, as if daring them to contradict her.

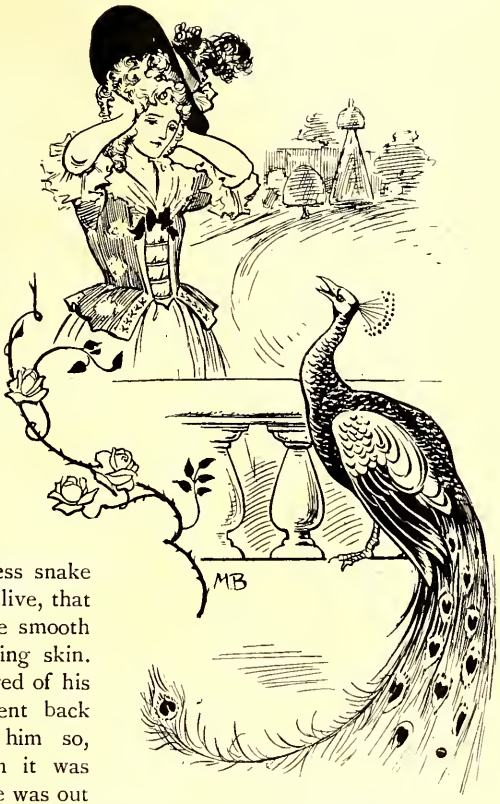
But they nodded one to another on their stems as the wind moved them, and cared nothing for Lady Clara in her tantrums. Why should they? They were doing their duty in being sweet and beautiful, and not a leaf of them cared, though a pettish girl called them duckweed all day long.

What made Lady Clara so cross and so unkind to herself and to all around her? Listen and you shall hear.

Lady Clara was selfish; and because she was selfish she was proud, and because she was proud she was idle. All her fine plans for doing things were only concerned about her own amusement; she did not want to mend linen, because it is a sad thing to see a piece of work that hands and machinery have toiled over to make perfect, torn and spoiled and neglected. She did not want to do anything that gave her trouble, unless it promised her amusement at the beginning or the end of it. Nothing was too good or too beautiful to serve a whim of Lady Clara's; if she wanted a pink and white flower for her hair or her breastknots, apple-blossoms must be gathered for her, and she never gave a single thought to the apples that now would never come to fruit on the bough that had been stripped for her.

The world was to move round her, and to the tune she called; but Lady Clara was not to move with the world as other things do that live on the surface and in the depths of the world—even trees and towers and pyramids.

However, there is an old proverb, "He that pays the piper, calls the tune," and so far Lady Clara had only called the tune to her little



world, and had paid nothing. Three years before she had come down here to her home, and idled through a whole summer, calling the tune to a boy of the village who believed in her as little children do in their mothers. This boy, Lawrence, danced to Lady Clara's piping whenever she chose to want him; he gathered wild strawberries and brought them to her when she declared herself tired of those grown in the garden; he tamed a lizard for her, and caught a harmless snake and brought it to her alive, that she might wonder at the smooth satin beauty of its shining skin. But Lady Clara grew tired of his devotion before she went back to town. She told him so, brutally, one day when it was raining dismally, and she was out of temper, and Lawrence never came before her eyes again.

Soon after that Lady Clara went up to London, and she heard but once more of Lawrence.

She was thinking of him now. He had been very gentle to her, very kind to all her whims, and when she had been hard and insolent to him, he had gone away without a word.

"I wish he were here now," she said to the nearest rose tree, "I wish—I'm sorry——" and quite suddenly she began to cry. For she knew that at last her wishes had come to a wall no human desire can climb over or go round. A beautiful peaceful country lies on the other side of the wall, we believe; but no one has come back to tell us what the country is like. For the name of the wall is Death.

Lawrence was dead; and Lady Clara had found him heedless of her at last. "I am growing tired of myself," Lady Clara whispered. "Myself used to be the best company to myself in the world, but now——"

It was high noon now, and everybody knows that that is the time when many strange things come to pass. It is an enchanted time, and all the good fairies know it.

Some spell of the noontime fell upon Lady Clara now, for there was nobody with her in the Hall garden, and yet she heard a voice speaking to her, calling her by her name.

"You are sick, Clara."

"I am well," Lady Clara cried. "My looking-glass tells me so every morning. My eyes are clear and my skin rosy; I am young and strong and beautiful."

"Yes, you are young and strong and beautiful," said the voice, "and yet you are sick of a strange malady, Clara. You have a stone in your breast instead of a heart, and that is why you often feel so weary. Tired of yourself, are you, Clara? Why, your very shadow is tired of you."

Clara flushed angrily.

"Your feet are tired of you; you have worn out their patience with dancing on waxed floors. Let them carry you to church sometimes, Clara; let them rest in the cottages of the poor. And give your hands a basket to carry. And give your idle hours some work to do in teaching village boys to read, and village girls to sew. You will not be so tired of yourself then, Clara."

"I hate village boys and girls," flashed Lady Clara. "They are not fit company for my father's daughter."

"You thought so, and you said so three years ago, Clara—and Lawrence died of it. Do you remember Lawrence?"

Lady Clara's head drooped, and her proud eyes filled with tears.

"There was a gardener once who lived alone in a garden with his wife, and God Himself used to walk in that garden in the cool of the evening, and talk with that gardener. Did you ever hear of Adam and Eve, Clara? They are laughing at you now, up yonder, you poor child, proud of your own weakness. Why, the flowers are wiser. You never found a rose proud of the canker that ate it. Be warned and grow wise, Clara. Grow kinder and humbler and gentler, lest in the end you be a weed and not a rose, and God find no room for you in His garden. Remember—

"'Tis only noble to be good:
Kind hearts are more than coronets,
And simple faith than Norman blood."

The Story of King Arthur.

HE came, a man grown, to a kingdom sadly in need of the strong hands of a king to keep it from being torn in pieces by the savage and heathen tribes who over-ran it, and had almost overwhelmed it, since the days of the last king, Uther Pendragon. He came to a kingdom, his by right, so most men said, for he was the son of Uther Pendragon, born after his father's death and hidden away by his mother and the wisest man in Britain, the enchanter Merlin, and kept in secret all the years of babyhood and boyhood for fear of his father's enemies. So most men said. But there was also a story that Arthur was not Uther Pendragon's son, nor any child of mortal man at all, but a changeling, a creature of fairy birth, who had been rolled up at Merlin's feet one day on the seashore, a tiny, naked baby, who rode unharmed on the crest of a great wave whose green billow was shot and sprinkled over

with magic fire. This child, so went the other story, Merlin caught up from the smother and welter of foam and fire, crying, "Here is the King of Britain," and this child was the Arthur who had been reared in loneliness and secrecy until the time was ripe for him to lay claim to the throne of Uther Pendragon.

Wherever the truth lay between the two stories, there was no doubt of Arthur's beauty and strength of body, no doubt of his wisdom and goodness, no doubt of his fitness to rule a turbulent country. He drew all the petty princedoms together, and made one kingdom of them instead of a hundred provinces; and when the barons and princes rose against him and made war, he closed in upon them in one great battle, and broke their ranks as smoke is broken into rags by the wind, and they were utterly subdued.

Chief among his knights was Sir Lancelot, the very perfect, gentle knight for whose sake went crazed with love and died the fairy lady of Shalott, and Elaine, the Lily-Maid of Astolat, and he was dearest of all his knights to the great-souled King. They had sworn undying love and brotherhood to each other on the field of battle, and in all his wars King Arthur and Lancelot fought side by side, and they loved and trusted each other wholly.

Fighting against robbers and cut-throats in the morasses of Cameliard, and destroying wild beasts in her forests, King Arthur stopped at the castle of the King of Cameliard, Leodogran, long enough to catch a glimpse of the King's daughter and only child, Guinevere, a girl of glorious beauty; and he set his heart to have her for his wife and Queen of all Britain. After the battle which made him acknowledged King, he sent knights to King Leodogran, Ulfius and Brastias and Bedivere, good knights and true, all three of them, though not so near to his heart as Sir Lancelot: and they brought from young King to old King a message that said simply, "If I have served you well in anything, give me your daughter Guinevere to wife."

At this demand King Leodogran was much perplexed, because he was not assured of King Arthur's claim to be Uther Pendragon's son; but he took counsel with his wisest men, and the answer that the knights took back to Arthur was "Yes." Then Arthur sent his best-beloved knight, Sir Lancelot, to fetch the Queen; and on one of the last days in April Lancelot rode away on his errand, and on May-day Guinevere and he came riding back under the May blossoms; and Guinevere and Arthur were married, and for a little while they reigned together in love and splendour, and Britain, paying no more tribute of gold to Rome or murdered men to the heathen tribes, was at peace, one kingdom governed by one King. And the fellowship of the Round Table grew greatly and prospered exceedingly. Wrongs were

redressed and poor folk helped, sad folk comforted, and wicked folk punished by Arthur and his knights. Women took pattern by Queen Guinevere's grace and kindness, and men followed after the King in all noble ways, and Britain was at rest. But there was a change coming that all the wisdom and courage of Arthur could not prevent. It was not the outbreak of heathen enemies or robber chiefs; this time the foe came from within. The knights grew less eager in good deeds, the ladies of the Court less gracious and sweet-minded. A lady from Cornwall with a bitter tongue came to the Court, and spread slander and ill-will there; and all the wisdom of the enchanter Merlin was powerless against the evil seed sown by this Vivien, for the old wizard fell in love with her beautiful face, and so had no more power against her, though he knew her all the time for the wicked spirit that she was. So helpless was he before her that he even told her a spell that would throw anyone into a dead sleep for centuries long, and this spell Vivien used against himself, so that Merlin, for all his wisdom, lay like a log in the forest where she had lured him, dreamlessly sleeping away the years of the enchantment, and all his counsel was lost to the King at the very time when it was needed most. Then a vision came to the knights assembled at Camelot—a vision that they called the Holy Grail—the vision of the Cup of the Sacramental wine carried on a silver moonbeam. Those who saw the vision of the Cup swore to follow it and see it again; those who did not see it, swore to make quest for it until they found it; and there was a great scattering of the Knights of the Round Table. Arthur, who had been absent from Camelot that day and had not seen the vision, was sorely sad at this quest that his knights had sworn, for he saw in it the beginning of the end of his Round Table; but he did not say them nay. One after another went off, and some returned quickly tired, and some were long away, and, having seen the Grail, turned holy men, becoming priests and hermits, and putting away their swords; and some never returned at all, but died in the quest. And only a few of the Round Table came back to stand beside the King in the shadows that were darkening down upon him.

A new sorrow came upon him now. Guinevere, his beautiful Queen, had long been growing tired of his austere and spotless goodness, and it befell that one day she left the Court, and stole away secretly, leaving the King a lonely man. Almost at the same time his nephew Modred took up arms against him, claiming the crown of Britain from him, with the old plea that Arthur was not a mortal man at all, but a fairy changeling; and with a much smaller following, and with a sick heart, Arthur rode into the West to do battle with this Modred. But before they met, Arthur turned aside to the nunnery at Almesbury, where Queen Guinevere had betaken herself, and without any anger, but with exceeding sorrow, he bade farewell to her and forgave her for her desertion of him. Then he rode on to his last great battle. It was fought in Cornwall, on a misty day in the winter; and when at the close of the day the King saw the mist lifting, he saw that his enemy Modred was dead, and all his false knights. Of Arthur's own Round Table there was left alive only Sir Bedivere. Then King Arthur called to Sir Bedivere, "I am sorely wounded, and without help I shall not see to-morrow. There is a ruined chapel near by—carry me there." And Sir Bedivere carried the wounded King to the chapel, and there laid him down; and the full moon rose in the sky and shone down on a wide lake near the chapel. "Take my sword Excalibar," said the King, "and throw it out into the mere yonder, and tell me what thou seest." Sir Bedivere took the sword and went down to the mere, but the gems in the hilt sparkled so that he could not bear to throw it away, and, hiding it in the reeds, he returned, saying, "I have seen nothing."

"That cannot be," said King Arthur; "thou hast surely played me false, Bedivere. Go now, and throw the sword in at once." And once more Sir Bedivere strode down to the water's edge, and thought to throw Excalibar into the lake, but again the beauty of its blade and hilt tempted him. "It should be kept," he said, "to show future Britons what manner of man King Arthur was." And again he hid it in the reeds. "What sawest thou?" asked Arthur; and Bedivere again answered, "Nothing." "Thou hast played me false," said the King. "Go again, and see that this time I am obeyed, or,

wounded as I am, I will surely slay thee." So Sir Bedivere flung the sword into the mere, but before it touched the water an arm rose from the mere, caught the hilt, and drew Excalibar under. Then he went back and told the King what he had seen. Then said King Arthur, "My time is come; carry me down to the margin of the lake." Sir Bedivere obeyed, and there he found waiting a black barge, and at the helm of it three Queens, crowned and robed; and these three, mourning and wailing, took the wounded King from Sir Bedivere and laid him in the barge, and slowly they sailed away under the moonlight.

"But now farewell. I am going a long way,
To the island-valley of Avilion;
Where falls not hail, or rain, or any snow,
Where I will heal me of my grievous wound."